Beyond Identity Amartya Sen

THE NEW REPUBLIC

Sylvia Plath's Appetite
Zoë Heller

W.'s Bogus Bipartisanship
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CEMBER 18, 2000

THE FINAL ACT?

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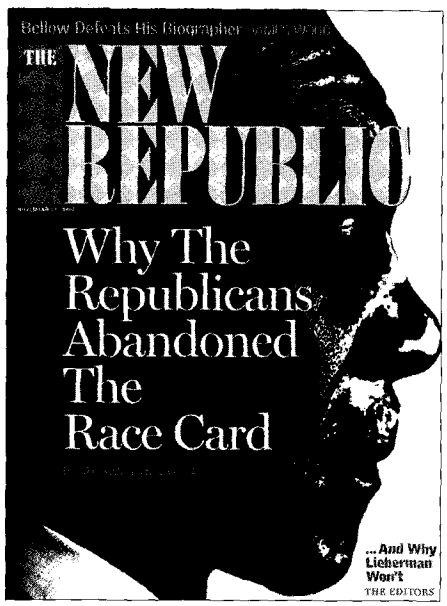
Inflammatory rhetoric

TO THE EDITORS:

As you note, *The American Mercury* was quite a scabrous rag. From 1952, the magazine was filled with wild invective, not only anti-Jewish but (mainly) anti-Communist. To smear his many targets on "the left," J. Russell Maguire, the *Mercury*'s editor at the time, used all the crudest propaganda tactics: inflammatory rhetoric, quotation out of context, guilt by association.

Such tactics also marked your slanderous editorial against Ralph Nader, "the left's gaunt hero," whom you accuse obliquely—and dishonestly—of anti-Semitism ("Unsafe at Any Speed," November 6). You base that charge on just one phrase out of an article by Nader, "Business Is Deserting America," which ran in the *Mercury* in 1960. There, you write, Nader "warned ominously of 'our ingrained gullibility to internationalism.'" You then provocatively quote a crackpot passage from some other article that also came out in the *Mercury* sometime back then—a frothing rant about "the vast machines" of communism and "world Zionism."


Bellow Defeats His Biographer
THE NEW REPUBLIC
Why The Republicans Abandoned The Race Card
...And Why Lieberman Won't
THE EDITORS

Maguire himself could not have done much better. Through that conjunction, you imply that Nader's use of "internationalism" was much the same as, say, Father Coughlin's. In fact the word has no such ominous tinge in Nader's solid article—in which there's not the slightest whiff of anti-Semitism, as the following *full* quotation should make clear: "Professing free trade at official levels while, in practice, hamstringing U.S. exports by prohibitions, quotas and other discriminatory treatment, Western Europe and Japan have found our ingrained gullibility to internationalism to be amazingly persistent despite the bitter lessons of recent history."

Nader's article concerns the trend of U.S. corporations making sweet deals with protectionist regimes (whose economies the United States had revived) and thereby screwing U.S. consumers. While Nader must regret having sent it to the *Mercury*, there's nothing in that article to be ashamed of. For the disgusting libel in your pages, on the other hand, you owe both Nader and your readers an apology.

MARK CRISPIN MILLER
Professor of Media Ecology
New York University
New York, New York

THE EDITORS REPLY:

Mark Crispin Miller accuses us of "guilt by association" for criticizing Ralph Nader for publishing an article in *The American Mercury* in 1960. But Nader ran for president this year. If George W. Bush had written an article for an anti-Semitic publication, would Miller similarly call it "slanderous" to bring up the topic? Yes, Nader's article was not itself anti-Semitic, but surely he knew of the *Mercury*'s hostility to Jews when he sent it in. At the time Nader was penning his article, newspaper columnists and radio commentators were denouncing the magazine, and the Anti-Defamation League had labeled it the "single most important anti-Semitic publication at the present time." A year earlier, *National Review* editor William F. Buckley, citing the "insidious anti-Semitism that lurks in the corners of the *Mercury*," had informed his magazine's writers that "*National Review* will not carry on its masthead the name of any person whose name also appears on the masthead of the *Mercury*." If Buckley considered the *Mercury* beyond the pale, don't we have a right to know why Nader didn't?

Settling accounts

TO THE EDITORS:

Ideologically predisposed to dislike a conference exploring the possibility of building a Democratic Party responsive to social movements, John B. Judis marginalizes it—and any debate about social change—as part of the "cultural left" ("Bad Trip," November 13). Judis conveniently forgets that conference participants included such "radicals" as John

Racial Conservatives:

Read the United States Census Bureau figures below and then let us hear you declare once more that African Americans in our country have now got just about as much as they ought to have.

Median Net Worth* Per Black Family

$4,418

Median Net Worth* Per White Family

$45,740

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (1993) *(Latest available statistics)*

*Value of all assets including home, auto, securities, and money in banks.

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Anderson, Theodore Lowi, Joel Rogers, Dean Barkley, and Steve Dasbach. As moderator, Judis cut off panelists in the middle of presentations and did not abide by explicit guidelines regarding question format. By all other accounts, the presentations by Stanley Aronowitz, Janice Fine, Dana Frank, Lawrence Goodwyn, and Michael Goldfield were informative—and at times inspiring.

IMMANUEL NESS
Assistant Professor and Conference Coordinator
Brooklyn College
City University of New York
Brooklyn, New York

JOHN B. JUDIS REPLIES:
Wrong. I adhered to time limits and guidelines to which the participants had agreed.

Politically Green

TO THE EDITORS:
Sarah Stewart Taylor's "Green Day" (November 6) struck a raw nerve, mostly because it was frighteningly accurate. There are a number of Ralph Nader supporters at Brandeis University, where I am a senior, and there seems to exist among them a common theme: a true lack of knowledge of the issues. Many Naderites, unlike the man they voted for, will acknowledge a difference between Al Gore and George W. Bush, but they still maintain that they had to "vote their conscience." When asked if their conscience was concerned about potential Supreme Court nominations, young Nader supporters dismiss the issue, arguing that the majority of people in the United States support abortion rights, thus making it impossible to overturn *Roe* v. *Wade*. While it is true that most Americans favor abortion, the Supreme Court does not have to respond to popular mandate—a fact that Naderites seem to forget or possibly not even to understand.

It is true that the Democrats need to know they have disillusioned liberal Americans, and Green Party supporters claim that voting for Nader was a political statement. But if Nader supporters truly had a grasp of the issues, I believe they would understand that they may have made that political statement at the expense of the country.

CAROLYN KLUGMAN
Waltham, Massachusetts

Chocolate sprinkles

TO THE EDITORS:
Like Ruth Franklin, I'm a fan of Stephen King, and, like her, I was disturbed by King's latest book, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* ("Stephen King and I," November 6). But *On Writing* does not prove that King is not to be taken seriously any more than Edgar Allan Poe's famous essay "The Philosophy of Composition" proves that "The Raven" is entirely a product of cold, rational thought. Real artists are rarely the best expositors of their own work. What is clear from *On Writing* is that King doesn't realize quite how good he is any more than do most of his critics.

Stephen King is not an intellectual. But he has both imagination and empathy—possibly more than any other living writer. Most critics would rather read a well-written book by a mediocrity than a poorly written one by a genius. Poe, for instance, who laid on adjectives like chocolate sprinkles, wasn't given the time of day by the critical establishment until it became clear that his ghosts were too original to stay buried. But, luckily, imagination outlasts everything—even whatever it is we currently like to think of as "literature."

BRIAN D'AMATO
Chicago, Illinois

THEO TSCHUY
Dangerous Diplomacy
Foreword by Simon Wiesenthal
The Story of Carl Lutz, Rescuer of 62,000 Hungarian Jews

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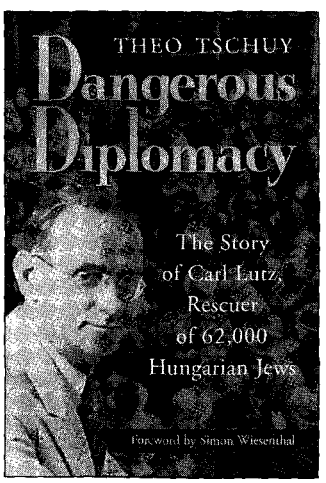

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Drag Race

I'M NOT SURE why, but one image from this election campaign still haunts me. It's the grainy black-and-white footage of a lynching filmed from the perspective of James Byrd Jr. Byrd was an African American man dragged from the back of a truck by white racists in Texas until his body was severed in two. The footage is from a political ad produced by the NAACP. Over this searing image comes the voice of the murdered man's daughter. She recalls that, in 1998, "my father was killed. He was beaten, chained, and dragged three miles to his death, all because he was black. So when Governor George W. Bush refused to support hate-crimes legislation, it was like my father was killed all over again."

This was the Willie Horton ad of 2000. In fact, it was worse than that. The Horton ad, designed to inflame white racial hatred, was produced by an independent group that George Bush senior's campaign eventually, if cynically, disowned. By contrast, Al Gore and Joseph Lieberman did not so much as distance themselves from the Byrd ad, even when given the opportunity to do so. The Horton ad was despicable, but at least it made some logical link between Michael Dukakis's leniency on prisoner furloughs and the ability of a furloughed Horton to commit more crimes. In this case, however, George W. Bush actually supports hate-crimes legislation for offenses motivated by hatred of a group, boasting in one debate that the perpetrators of the Byrd lynching had been, in his words, "put to death." (Actually, two got the death penalty; the third was imprisoned for life.) Bush opposed the stronger hate-crimes law the ad alluded to because it covered homosexuals; his opposition had nothing to do with the Byrd case. The coup de grâce of the James Byrd ad was the use of Byrd's daughter, in her own voice, to all but accuse George W. Bush himself of being a party to the lynching. Even Lee Atwater didn't stoop that low.

This campaign has now, finally, reached its bitter endgame. But in some ways the legacy of that ad—and the politics behind it—remain with us. The only reason we are still without a president-elect is that the election, in Florida in particular, was so close. And the main reason it was so close in Florida is racial politics. One of Gore's few masterstrokes in his largely dismal campaign was his ability to bring a record number of African Americans to the polls and win the votes of almost all of them. He did that with a racially loaded campaign that was, in the end, a victim of its own success—a failure for which we may all be quietly grateful.

The racial appeal began early on, when Donna Brazile was appointed Gore's campaign manager. Earlier this year, Brazile opined in *The Washington Post* that she would never let the "white boys" win. She explained that she wasn't referring to "gender or race, it's an attitude. A white-boy attitude is 'I must exclude, denigrate, and leave behind.'" Gore didn't fire her for these racist assertions. In fact, he adopted her tactics. Throughout the campaign, Gore appealed to black fears and resentments. "When my opponent, Governor Bush, says he'll appoint strict constructionists to the Supreme Court," Gore said, "I often think of the strictly constructionist meaning that was applied when the Constitution was written—how some people were considered three-fifths of a human being." Pro-Gore leaflets distributed in New Jersey showed Bush's face superimposed on a Confederate flag. Gore junked Bill Clinton's careful formulation about mending affirmative action and replaced it with an unequivocal defense of race preferences, rooted in the notion of permanent black victimhood. In the campaign's final week, speaking at a prayer breakfast, Gore even compared his election battle to a fight between "good" and "evil." Better to practice racial division and win than practice racial healing and lose.

And win Gore did. Although Bush worked harder than any recent Republican nominee to reach out to black voters, Gore won a stratospheric nine out of ten black votes nationally—almost 20 percent of his total vote, better even than Clinton. All of this was combined with a massive get-out-the-vote effort. Although black turnout nationally—at 10 percent—was unchanged, critical states saw huge leaps. Florida, in particular, was a test case. Black turnout grew by 65 percent over 1996, and Gore won 93 percent of it. Large numbers of these voters were the recipients of "knock and drag" Election Day tactics, which corralled them en masse to the polls.

The result was a hyperclose race in Florida, a race Gore may well have lost because it's simply very difficult to mount this kind of ambitious, single-constituency campaign flawlessly. Florida's spoiled votes or nonvotes were disproportionately in black precincts. The liberal media has started claiming that this amounts to discrimination—even denial of civil rights. But the only hard evidence of this, apart from stray anecdotes, is that the infamous Votomatic machines were disproportionately located in poorer counties, and poorer counties tend to have disproportionate black populations. So the discrimination, if that is what it is, was based on class, not race. Besides, it's a little hard to argue that systematic voter suppression has occurred when your turnout has grown 65 percent in four years and the black share of all Florida voters—16 percent—is greater than their share of the population as a whole.

But, if not discrimination, what explains the error rate? The truth may well be more depressing than we want to admit. In Duval County, which has large numbers of poor black and white voters and Votomatic machines throughout, the voting error rates were not equally distributed. The errors were overwhelmingly in black precincts—and in the region of 10 percent. The most likely reason is that vast numbers of new, inexperienced voters simply overwhelmed the ability of polling stations to cope. To add to the mess, poor black voters were probably in need of more help than most—and didn't get it. *The Village Voice* reported this week that a 1993 study put the black adult literacy rate in Duval at 53 percent. This statistic might help explain why many black voters there voted twice after being instructed by Democratic election workers to punch every page. The presidential ballot, alas, had two pages of candidates. Some 11,000 votes were invalidated in black precincts in Duval alone.

So Gore may be right that he won Florida—if you count intention to vote rather than successful execution. But it's hard not to have mixed feelings about this apparent injustice. On the one hand, high black turnout is a great thing, and it's maddening that many voters didn't get the help they needed to vote correctly. (It's tragic that they needed that help in the first place.) On the other hand, it's hard not to be dismayed by a campaign that used the harshest of racial appeals to rally a base around victimized groupthink—and then treated these voters like so much ballot fodder on Election Day. If Al Gore pressed this manipulation of a constituency beyond the breaking point, then it's hard to feel too much sympathy for his plight. Live by the race card, die by the race card. But better not to play it at all.

ANDREW SULLIVAN

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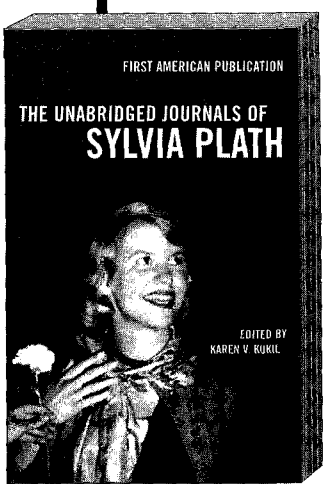

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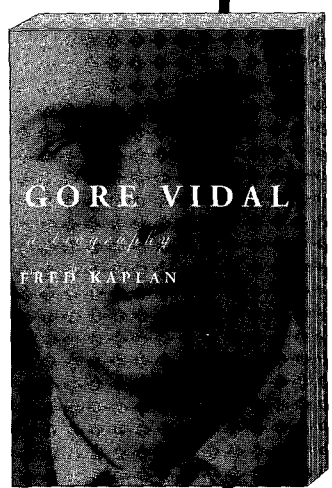

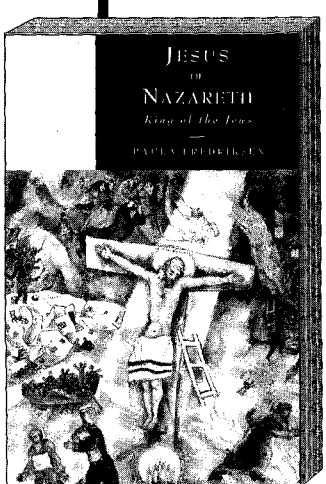

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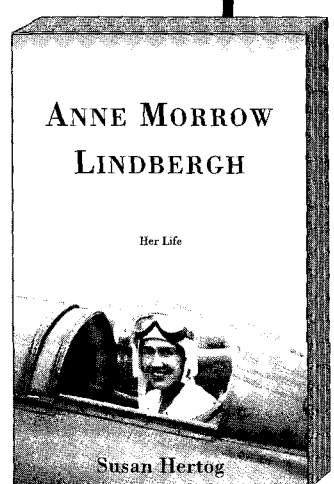

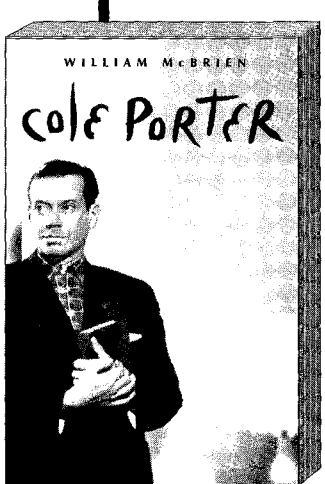

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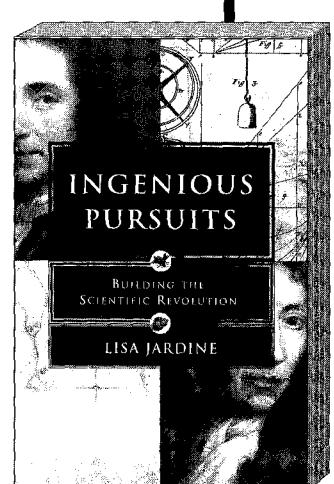

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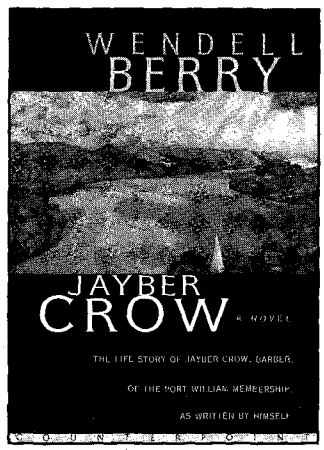

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"Jayber Crow is an observant and agreeably rough-hewn book...by the end **this melancholy barber has won both our attention and our hearts."**
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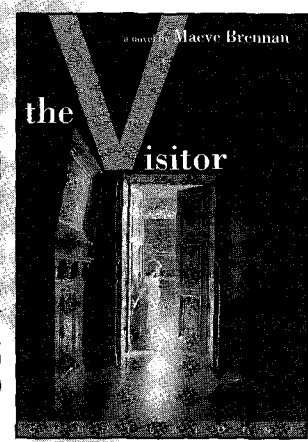

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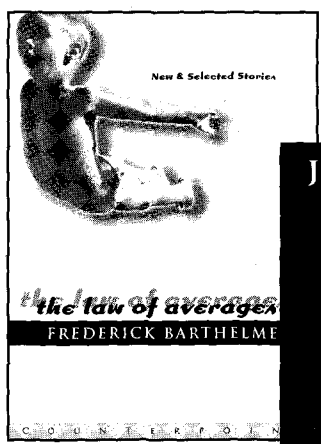
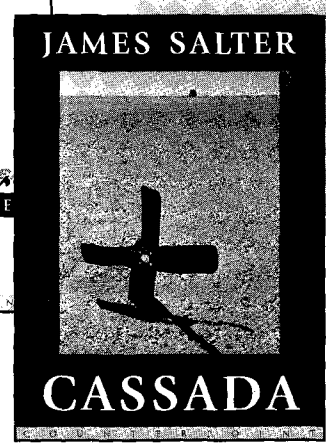
—Richard Eder, *Los Angeles Times*

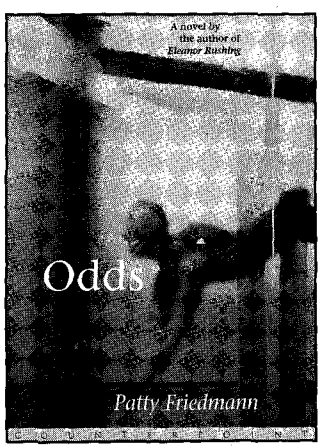




CASSADA
A Novel
James Salter

Counterpoint is pleased to announce James Salter's new novel—inspired by his long-out-of-print second novel, *The Arm of Flesh*—a remarkable story about officers in an Air Force Squadron in cold war Europe. More than a simple revision, *Cassada* is now, as Salter says, "the book the other might have been."

"[Salter] can, when he wants, **break your heart with a sentence."**
—Michael Dirda, *The Washington Post*



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—Kathryn Harrison, author of *The Kiss*

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"Victoria Lancelotta's stories come on hot and sharp and salty, but under the sensuousness lurks a bladelike clarity. Her young women are grappling with more than just the dangerous, soul-shaking mysteries of sex and intimacy and adulthood."
—Stewart O'Nan

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Supreme Indifference

SOMETIMES SILENCE SPEAKS louder than words. This week, the U.S. Supreme Court stepped back from the brink when it sent *Bush* v. *Palm Beach* back to the Florida Supreme Court for clarification. Given the hole the Court had dug for itself, it was a narrow escape. But the fact that the justices took the case in the first place, along with the deep divisions they subsequently displayed at oral argument, suggests that they are as susceptible as everyone else to viewing the current legal battle for Florida's votes through partisan lenses. And the fact that their ruling reserves the option of future intervention suggests that the ideological split between the justices has yet to be bridged.

From the start, this toxic case in no way merited the Court's attention. The Florida Supreme Court had extended the deadline for manual recounts of the presidential vote in three counties, in an effort to rationalize apparently contradictory state laws allowing such recounts but providing too little time to complete them. One can argue that the state court's ruling was wrong, but it was well within the court's purview. Nonetheless, at least four Supreme Court justices refused to restrain themselves, voting to hear the Bush campaign's appeal at a moment when it looked as if the ongoing recounts might hand the election to Al Gore. Nor was there anything restrained about the bitter ideological divisions the Court displayed at the argument last Friday. The liberal justices claimed the Florida Supreme Court's decision deserved federal deference even if aspects of it were open to question. The conservative justices, meanwhile, embraced a surprising and flimsy theory that made them appear to be grasping at straws in an effort to rule for George W. Bush.

The conservatives pointed to *McPherson* v. *Blacker*, an 1892 decision, to suggest that Article 2 of the U.S. Constitution, which gives state legislatures the power to appoint electors, prohibits a state court from relying on its own constitution in construing its electoral laws. But this is not what the *Blacker* decision says. In that case, the Michigan legislature had provided for district-based appointment of presidential electors, as Maine and Nebraska do today; the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed a decision by the Michigan Supreme Court upholding the electoral arrangement. In the course of the decision, the Court quoted a Senate report observing that state legislatures could authorize the state Supreme Courts to appoint electors, but the power of the state legislature to appoint electors could not be "modified by their state constitutions." By this, the Senate meant that a state constitution couldn't remove from the legislature the power to appoint electors. But the *Blacker* opinion never suggested that a state Supreme Court, duly authorized by a legislature to interpret electoral laws, could not rely on its own constitution in such interpretations. On the contrary, the *Blacker* decision says explicitly that "the right to vote intended to be protected refers to the right to vote as established by the laws and constitution of the State."

Had the Court used this tortured and misguided logic to strike down the Florida ruling, as Justice Antonin Scalia seemed ready to do, it would have been a disaster. Had it divided along party lines, on a five-to-four, conservatives-versus-liberals vote, the Court would have done deep, perhaps irreparable, damage to its carefully cultivated reputation for neutrality. Thank goodness it stopped short. Still, it could have found better ways to do so. The Court could have embraced a more self-abnegating exit strategy—declaring the case moot, unripe, nonjusticiable, or not presenting an obviously federal question. Or it could have dismissed the case as improvidently granted, without giving a reason. Any of these outcomes would have been better than sending it back to the Florida court and thereby allowing the conservative justices to keep their options open in the event they are unhappy with the state court's subsequent rulings. While this may serve the Court's institutional interests by allowing it the opportunity to take over the case once again, it has kept the country guessing about who has the ultimate authority to resolve the electoral feud—the Florida courts, Congress, or the justices themselves.

If Bush's lead holds, this question may be moot. But if Al Gore wins a belated victory in the Florida Supreme Court, or if the Seminole County absentee-ballot trial now taking place alters the electoral outcome, the question will again become not only relevant but crucial. Had the Supreme Court bowed out gracefully and unequivocally, it could have brought some clarity to subsequent proceedings in the Florida legislature and perhaps in Congress. Instead, it refused to show its hand, while retaining the right to meddle in the electoral dispute at a later date. In so doing, the justices placed their own interests above the nation's. ■

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NOTEBOOK

SECRETARY POTHOLE: When the names of possible Cabinet appointees began to leak from Camp Bush a week ago, there were a lot of intriguing suggestions: a war hero (Colin Powell, for secretary of state); a moderate, controversial governor (Tom Ridge, for secretary of defense); even a Democrat (John Breaux, for secretary of energy). But the most interesting name of all may have been one that got far less attention: *The Boston Globe* and *The Boston Herald* reported that Massachusetts Governor Paul Cellucci was a contender for secretary of transportation. Residents of the Bay State understand how absurd that is: As governor, Cellucci has presided over Boston's Central Artery Project, a.k.a. the Big Dig, a.k.a. one of the biggest boondoggles in American history. In his 1998 gubernatorial campaign, facing attacks on his management skills, Cellucci assured voters that the Big Dig would be completed "on budget." Not quite. The latest cost projections show its price tag inching up toward $14 billion, at least $10 billion more than the original projection. That's not entirely Cellucci's fault, but even his supporters concede that he erred by not overseeing the project more aggressively—and then by standing by the Big Dig's (now ousted) director for too long. So why would Cellucci be considered for any Cabinet post, let alone this one? Perhaps because he possesses the one qualification the Bush family values above all others: blind loyalty. Cellucci was an early supporter of the Bush presidential campaign—the original one, in 1980, when W.'s father ran for president. And he's been helping the family ever since. A close personal friend of Bush's likely chief of staff, fellow Bay Stater Andrew Card, Cellucci headed up Bush's New England campaign this year, and while he couldn't deliver New Hampshire in the primaries, he made up for it by vouching for Bush's sensitivity to Catholics after the Bob Jones University incident. Of course, even loyalty has limits. In Massachusetts, sources close to Cellucci admit that, because of the Big Dig and the confirmation troubles it would create, it's now more likely he will end up with an ambassadorship, maybe to Italy. That sounds about right. How much worse can the roads there get?

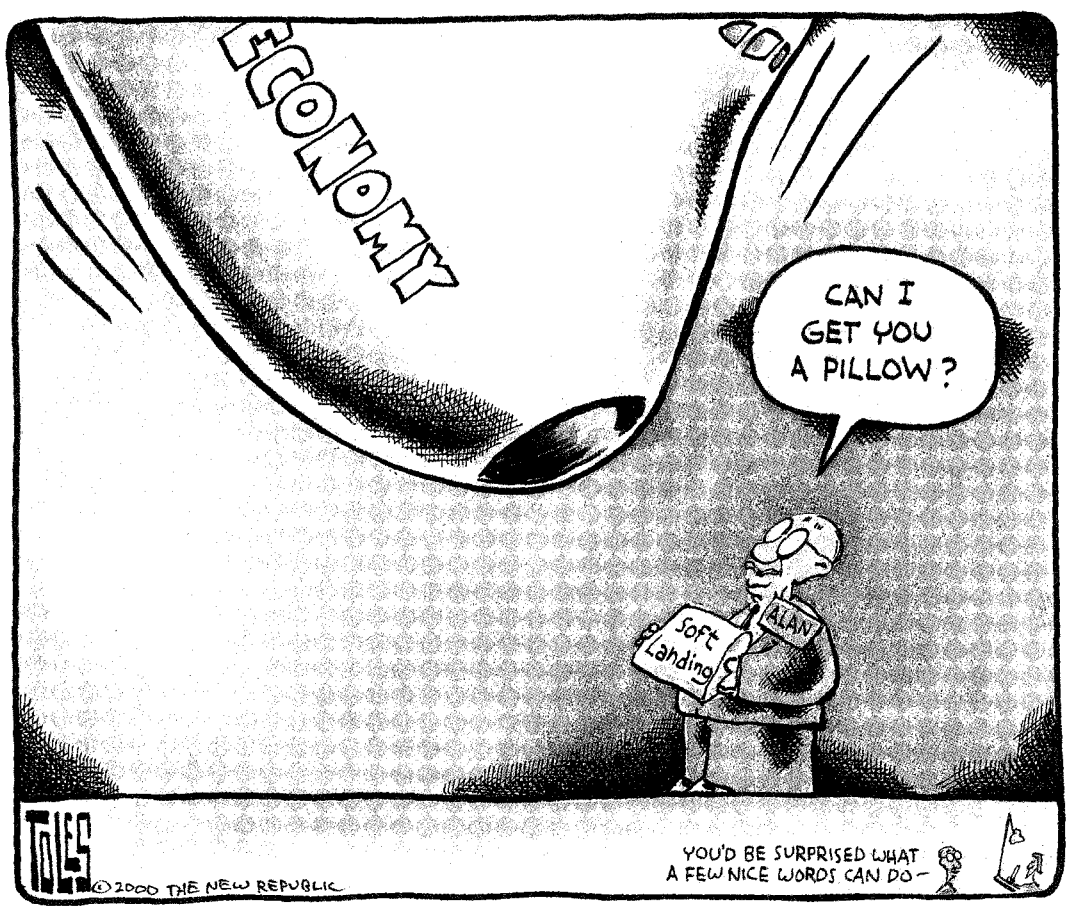
FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO DIDN'T WORK IN POPPY'S WHITE HOUSE: "Applicants interested in serving in the administration will be able to apply online via a secure server. Contributions are limited to $5,000 and can be donated online or via mail to the Bush-Cheney transition effort." —Bush-Cheney press release, December 5

DEADLINE CREEP: "On Sunday, if he's behind, obviously at 5 p.m. Sunday, I think the ball game's over for Gore." —*Newsweek*'s Howard Fineman, on "Today," November 23

"[Democrats] will stick with [Gore] in public, and reluctantly in private, I think, at least until the Supreme Court says something."—Fineman, on "Hardball," November 30

"The December 12 deadline, I think, is a very real one.... The clock ... runs out on the twelfth."—Fineman, on "Hardball," December 4

TALMUDIC SCHOLARS WATCH CONT'D: "He's a rabbi, not a miracle-maker."—Democratic Representative James P. Moran, on Joe Lieberman's efforts to reassure Democrats nervous about Gore's chances, *The New York Times*, December 5



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FUZZY MATH, THE SEQUEL: Al Gore may be losing the legal battle for Florida's 25 electoral votes, but evidence continues to mount that he was, in fact, the choice of a majority of Floridians. This week, *The Miami Herald* published a detailed statistical analysis that determined that if errors attributable to voting machines are factored out, Gore would have won Florida by up to 23,000 votes. The reason for the disparity is that Gore's support was disproportionately concentrated in counties that employ punch-card machines, which failed to record votes on 3.9 percent of their ballots, whereas Bush's support was disproportionately concentrated in counties that use optical-scan machines, which rejected only 1.4 percent of their ballots. It defies belief that voters who live in punch-card counties are almost three times as likely not to cast a presidential vote as voters in optical-scan counties, especially given that the dramatically different rates prevail even across demographically similar counties that use the two different voting technologies. The *Herald* noted that even if only one in ten of the voters whose ballots weren't recorded had intended to vote, that still could have provided a large enough margin to give Gore the win. Did the Bush campaign respond by critiquing the *Herald*'s methodology? Or by noting that, while more voters may have intended to vote for Gore, the readable ballots narrowly favored Bush? Not exactly. "Statistical voodoo," complained Bush spokesman Tucker Eskew. Bush attorney Ted Olson seconded the know-nothing critique: "It reminds me of the—Johnny Carson used to hold up the envelope, and then guess what the answer was," he stammered. "They have not counted those ballots, and so they're discerning through some sort of magic what the outcome could have been." Magic? Voodoo? Next thing you know, they'll be comparing it to evolution.

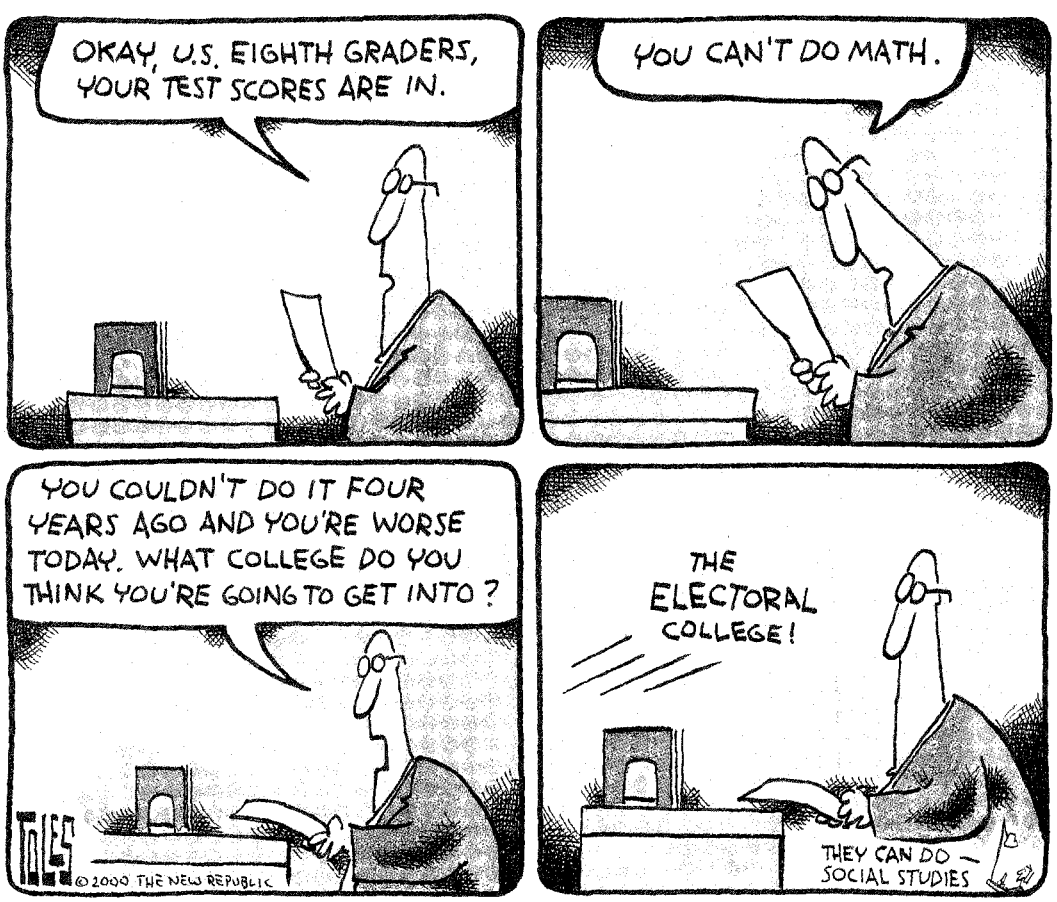
THE WALLET'S IN ONLY HALF AS DEEP: "My job as chairman of this committee will draw upon my previous profession. And remember that I spent every day for twenty years waking up, training in the morning, working through about every other night, for one thing, and that is to be within forty-five seconds, within forty-five seconds, to be able to cut out the human heart."—Tennessee Senator Bill Frist, a physician, commenting on his new fund-raising role as chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, December 5

RULES TO LIVE BY: "'Conservatives' (who are 'paranoid' verging on 'insane,' in the medical judgment of the scrupulously nonpartisan *New Republic*) have transferred an irrational animus against Bill Clinton to Al Gore."—*The Weekly Standard*, December 11

"We dissent from the view ... that 'consider the source' might ever serve as a sufficient rejoinder in American political debate."—*The Weekly Standard*, same issue, same article, next paragraph

BEFORE THE GOP, HE WASN'T TRULY ALIVE: "I've been waiting all my life to have a Republican president and a Republican Congress."—Texas Senator Phil Gramm, who served as a Democratic representative from 1979 to 1983, *The New York Times*, December 6

DOES HIS WIFE KNOW?: "I'm going to wake up very comfortable every morning knowing that Dick Cheney is going to be sitting there, ready to give advice."—Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, in *The New York Times*, December 6 ■


OKAY, U.S. EIGHTH GRADERS, YOUR TEST SCORES ARE IN.
YOU CAN'T DO MATH.
YOU COULDN'T DO IT FOUR YEARS AGO AND YOU'RE WORSE TODAY. WHAT COLLEGE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING TO GET INTO?
THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE!
THEY CAN DO — SOCIAL STUDIES
TOLES
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Why Bush won't have a bipartisan administration.

Party Foul

By FRANKLIN FOER

COLLIN PETERSON IS not an obvious choice for a Cabinet post. The Minnesota congressman has never held a major committee assignment, he's associated with no important legislation, and he's virtually unknown outside his district. In fact, if Peterson has any claim to fame at all, it's for his eccentric interests. In 1998, he proposed a constitutional amendment allowing northwestern Minnesota to secede to Canada. One of his primary crusades has been to open federal lands for year-round hunting. And yet Peterson, according to a report in last week's *Roll Call*, is on George W. Bush's shortlist for secretary of agriculture. The reason? Peterson is a Democrat. And Washington opinion makers are convinced that if Bush takes the presidency, his best hope for political survival is a bipartisan administration. *The New York Times*' Thomas L. Friedman has called for a "national unity government." *The Wall Street Journal*'s Al Hunt says naming Democrats to his Cabinet is Bush's only chance to make his presidency "worth something."

But there's a problem: Naming members of the opposition party to your Cabinet as a gesture of bipartisan cooperation doesn't work. At best, Bush's Democratic appointments would be empty symbols—marginal figures from the party's fringe who engender little goodwill in their former colleagues. At worst, they'd be viewed as turncoats, actually heightening partisan distrust.

Ask Bill Clinton. In need of some bipartisan bona fides to soothe the venomous congressional GOP, Clinton reached across the aisle in 1996 to tap William Cohen for secretary of defense. As a senator, the upright Cohen enjoyed the respect of his colleagues; as defense secretary, he's received generally solid marks. Nevertheless, after Attorney General Janet Reno, he has become the Republicans' most despised Cabinet member. "One could not ask," opines *National Review Online*, "for a better example of the corruption of American politics than William Cohen, allegedly the secretary of defense." Or, as Tom Donnelly, a former staffer on the House Armed Services Committee, says: "I've seen it. Cohen makes Republican teeth grind." As a result, when the administration has looked to Cohen to build bipartisan support for its policies—the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, Kosovo, missile defense—he's been unable to deliver.

Nor is Cohen an isolated case. When Daniel Patrick Moynihan joined the Nixon administration in the late '60s, Democrats whispered that he had opportunistically sold out his party. Similarly, John F. Kennedy's recruitment of Republicans like Ford honcho Robert McNamara and Wall Street whiz C. Douglas Dillon didn't persuade the GOP to like his administration more—only to trust McNamara and Dillon less. When Clinton proposed making Massachusetts Governor William Weld ambassador to Mexico in 1997, Weld's fellow Republicans were so livid that they torpedoed the nomination.

The Bush administration's efforts at a bipartisan Cabinet would probably fare no better. For starters, no Democrat with any future in the party is going to jeopardize his career by consorting with a man his co-partisans believe has filched a presidential election. Already, an embarrassing series of Democrats—former Georgia Senator Sam Nunn, North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt, California Representative Cal Dooley—have gunned down Bush campaign trial balloons.

And so the Bushies have appealed to ever more marginal candidates, floating the names of conservative Democrats like Peterson, Louisiana Senator John Breaux, and Texas Representatives Ralph Hall and Charlie Stenholm. It's not just that these pols (with the possible exception of Breaux) are unknown. They're also so far to the right of their party that their colleagues already view them with suspicion—if not contempt. Peterson, Hall, and Stenholm receive ratings from the American Conservative Union leaning in the direction of Tom DeLay's. Breaux has been a leading proponent of entitlement reforms most Democrats vehemently oppose. All four men are pro-life and pro-gun, and they flunk pretty much every imaginable liberal litmus test. The only time their fellow Democrats pay much attention to them at all is when they're trying to persuade them not to switch parties—which is essentially what they'd be doing if they went to work for W.

Anyone who doubts the vengeance a party can wreak on its apostates need look no further than Michael Forbes, the Long Island Republican who switched to the Democrats last year. Describing Forbes's future prospects to *The New York Times*, chief House fund-raiser Tom Davis III asked, "Have you ever heard of the movie *Dead Man Walking*?" A month later, after endless GOP bad-mouthing, Davis's prediction came true when Forbes lost his seat in the primaries. When Democrats discuss the fate of party members who take Bush administration jobs, they also turn to the vocabulary of Tony Soprano. "If they want to be Tom DeLay's puppets," a Democratic House aide told me, "and never want to work in Democratic politics again, that's fine. They'll be dead to us."

THIS YEAR DEMOCRATS would have particular reason to lash out at defectors. With the Senate evenly split and the House nearly so, Democrats jumping to a Bush administration could tilt the congressional balance of power in the GOP's direction. Most of Bush's potential appointees, after all, hail from conservative rural districts, where Republicans would likely win seats in special elections.

In fact, the only people who might hate Bush's bipartisan appointments more than the Democrats would are his fellow Republicans, eager for the plums of executive patronage after eight years out of power. Party faithful are already clamoring to pack the administration with recently defeated colleagues like Rick Lazio, Spencer Abraham, and John Ashcroft. *The New York Times* reported that Dennis Hastert and Trent Lott categorically rejected Bush's suggestion of a

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Democratic treasury secretary, perhaps to save the spot for outgoing Representative Bill Archer. "We don't live in a parliamentary democracy," says Ken Duberstein, former chief of staff for Ronald Reagan. "A Republican administration should consist of Republicans." Even a Democrat as conservative as Stenholm is described by anonymous Republicans quoted in *The Wall Street Journal* as "too partisan" for a Cabinet post. (Never mind that he voted to impeach Clinton.) For his part, Collin Peterson may still have a shot at the agriculture job. He probably wouldn't hold much sway with his fellow Democrats on Capitol Hill. But at least he'd have the credibility to stop those nasty grain wars with Canada. ■

Dick Cheney's surprising cure for a recession.

Cut to the Chase

By JONATHAN CHAIT

THE MINUTE IT looks like George W. Bush may finally win the White House, his campaign begins to talk about—what else?—cutting taxes. It's as if the GOP had no other reason for holding office. As Marshall Wittmann, the iconoclastic conservative analyst, puts it, "God put Republicans on Earth to cut taxes."

Of course, when it comes to constructing a macroeconomic rationale for tax-cutting, divine mandate is not the firmest foundation. So the Republicans are now putting forth a more plausible-sounding justification for large, across-the-board cuts: the danger of an impending recession. "The economy is slowing down," GOP vice presidential nominee Dick Cheney declared last week. "And I would hope that would change people's calculations with respect to the wisdom of the kind of tax cuts that Governor Bush has recommended." Bush himself has presumably been informed of Cheney's argument, and, assuming he becomes president, we should be hearing plenty more of it over the next few months.

On the surface, Cheney's reasoning sounds like a sensible application of Keynesian economic theory. According to the legendary British economist John Maynard Keynes, the government should use its power of the purse to keep the economy steady. During economic contractions, that means increasing federal spending or cutting taxes, to put money into consumers' pockets and jump-start demand for new goods. During expansions, it means increasing taxes and cutting spending in the immediate future, to keep the economy from overheating and to build up a surplus for that next contraction. Usually conservatives invoke Keynes the way Stalin invoked Trotsky—as proof of ideological deviance. But, now that his teachings appear to bolster their favorite cause, we can expect to hear them regularly invoking his theory, if not his name. Trouble is, the theory doesn't match Bush's program.

The first problem with Cheney's argument is that we're not in a recession. Sure, economic growth has slowed in the last few months—to 2.4 percent, from roughly twice that in the previous quarter, which was unsustainably high. But that's still a pretty decent rate. Compared with the rate of growth during—to take a recent administration at random—George Bush's presidency, it's downright giddy. A recession, mind you, is defined not as *low* economic growth but as *negative* economic growth. Nothing even close to that has happened thus far.

But, even if the economy does move into recession sometime in the near future, tax cuts should not be the remedy of first resort. A better option would be for the Federal Reserve to reduce interest rates—which, by encouraging borrowing, would stimulate the economy. If this didn't help, then it might be time for tax cuts. But Bush's team wants a big tax cut before it's even clear that we're approaching a recession, which would be a gross overreaction. Keynes, after all, did not promote fiscal stimulus as a response to every slight economic ailment—only as a desperate measure when consumer confidence had sunk so low that loose money couldn't save it. One of the great successes of the Clinton administration has been its ability to restrain itself from reacting to every small blip of economic news. Clinton decided early in his tenure to leave day-to-day economic management to the Federal Reserve. Over the last eight years, this lesson has so deeply permeated the consciousness of Wall Street and the White House that it has produced an almost comical deference to Alan Greenspan. Yet the Bushies seem not to have learned it at all.

One reason managing the economy is generally best left to Greenspan and Co. is that the president and Congress are not well-suited to managing the business cycle. For one thing, the political system takes longer than the Federal Reserve to have an impact on the economy. By the time any new stimulus has passed into law and worked its way into the economy, the economic situation may have changed completely. Bush's plan phases in over nine years, which will give the economy a good boost right around the first term of the Jeb Bush administration. A second problem is that elected officials often lack the detachment necessary to make proper macroeconomic decisions. If it wants to keep things on an even keel, Congress needs not only to heat up demand when the economy slows down but to cool it back down—i.e., raise taxes and/or cut spending—when the economy speeds up. But, unsurprisingly, elected officials are much more eager to give out money than to take it back. (Can you recall your congressman ever declaring that we need to tamp down economic growth with tax hikes or spending cuts? Me neither.) And if you're only going to step on the gas pedal and never hit the brake, then you're better off leaving the driving to somebody else.

It's not just that politicians are cowardly. New spending programs and tax cuts are also structurally difficult to reverse once enacted. The danger is that, in responding to a short-term economic tremor, a big new tax cut would create a permanent drain on government revenue. With Washington awash in surpluses, that might not pose a big problem in the immediate future. But eventually, when the baby-boom gen-

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eration retires, the government will face huge, unfunded obligations. Giving back all that money now would blow a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to put the government on firm footing for decades to come.

Which, for many conservatives, is exactly the point. Bush's tax cut is not a finely calibrated response to the economic circumstances we find ourselves in right now. Heck, it was drawn up a year ago, when the economy was still in full boom. It's basically the same economic idea Republicans have been pushing for two decades. Last year, with a red-hot economy, Bush introduced his tax cut as "insurance" against recession. If a recession does occur, that will be still more reason to pass the tax cut. But, of course, if you want to cut taxes both to ward off a recession and to get out of one, then you really want to cut taxes all the time. Cheney's talk of impending recession is just the latest in a series of situational rationales.

Indeed, if you really were crafting a tax cut aimed at spurring consumer demand, it wouldn't look anything like Bush's slowly phased-in, hyper-regressive plan. Rather, you would cut taxes immediately, and mainly for low- and middle-income earners, who are most likely to spend their tax cut right away—as opposed to the very rich, who will save more of it. No doubt Bush's economists understand this. But they seem not to have told their front men. "[R]educing marginal rates," explained Cheney, is "exactly what needs to be done with respect to providing the kind of stimulus to ensure the resumption of long-term economic growth." This statement, though adorned with responsible-sounding economic buzzwords, is nonsensical. Stimulating the economy is an answer to a short-term downturn; it has nothing to do with long-term economic growth. And cutting marginal tax rates over a nine-year span is a brutally inefficient way of stimulating the economy. If this is Cheney's understanding of the Bush plan, Lord only knows what Bush himself thinks. ■

Georgetown Dispatch

Campus Police

By MARCIA YABLON

NO ONE HAS polled the residents of Georgetown on how they feel about the Florida election controversy. But it's a safe bet they're outraged by what the Republicans have done. Georgetown, after all, is the headquarters of Washington's liberal elite. Joseph Alsop, John F. Kennedy, and Pamela Harriman once called it home. Katharine Graham, Madeleine Albright, and Joseph Lieberman still do. So if anybody were likely to demand that every vote be counted—that no group be treated unfairly—it would likely be the wealthy, socially enlightened citizens who live on the tree-lined streets along the banks of the Potomac.

But, when it comes to their own neighborhood, Georgetown's elite have, shall we say, a more narrow perspective. One of the most entertaining battles in Washington these days is the fight between the area's permanent residents and the approximately 6,400 undergraduates who attend Georgetown University. The homeowners say they are sick of the rowdy college students acting like, well, rowdy college students. So when a few undergraduates tried to run for seats on Georgetown's Advisory Neighborhood Commission four years ago, the locals set out to stop them—via methods that would make Katherine Harris proud.

First, the homeowners sued the student candidates, alleging they were not legitimate residents of the District of Columbia and thus ineligible to run for office. (The suit eventually failed and is now being appealed in federal court.) At the same time, they pressured students not to exercise their right to vote. In one case, a commission member actually distributed unsigned flyers claiming that students registering to vote in Washington could lose their Georgetown scholarships.

Next came the Election Day shenanigans. When students arrived at their polling places, local election officials cross-referenced their names with the university's student directory. The officials then tried to disqualify students whose directory listings included out-of-state home addresses, on the theory that they weren't true residents. At one polling place, an on-site precinct captain overruled the local officials, but those officials say they kept challenging the students anyway—just to get the objections on record and lay the groundwork for potential lawsuits.

In the end, two Georgetown students still won seats on the commission, and their student successors continue to serve today. But the town-gown battle has raged on, culminating this year in a curious spectacle: Georgetown homeowners, who pride themselves on being some of Washington's most tolerant residents, are using every legal weapon at their disposal to drive students out of the neighborhood.

At the forefront of this effort are Tom Schneidermann and Julia Falconer. Nearly four years ago, the couple moved into a townhouse down the street from the university's front gates. Though their building is sandwiched between student apartments, Schneidermann says he and Falconer didn't count on the constant disruptions from parties and loud students, particularly on weekends. "I have not been able to live in peace," he complains. Schneidermann says the couple tried calling the police, but to no avail.

So now Schneidermann and Falconer have taken the matter into their own hands: Three months ago, they filed a lawsuit against the university, alleging, according to their lawyer, that Georgetown has the "legal duty to allow other community residents to enjoy their homes in relative peace and quiet." They are seeking $100,000 in damages, and they want a court to bar the school from hosting events with more than 24 people on its front lawn—which would make graduation, in its current form, illegal. Schneidermann says this is the only way to deal with the deviant subculture that surrounds him. "We have people around us who break the law every weekend," he says, "We shouldn't be moving—they should be changing their behavior."

The university may well prevail in court. But that won't be the end of the story. Local homeowners have already tried

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to change Washington's 1977 Human Rights Act, which includes students as a protected class. This protected status forbids neighborhood residents from using preferential housing and other incentives to move student residents out of certain areas. This September, Georgetown homeowners backed an amendment to the act, proposed by the local office of planning, that would make such preferences legal. And, to force the university's cooperation, according to the *Georgetown Hoya*, the student newspaper, the local zoning board delayed approval of a university plan to increase enrollment—which, presumably, would flood the neighborhood with even more students.

Student advocates compare the proposed amendment to residential zoning laws drawn up to keep out blacks and other minorities. And, just last week, a lawyer from the office of planning said it had dropped the proposal. But now the homeowners have other plans. If they can't bar the students from their neighborhoods, they at least want the university to help keep its students in line by releasing their personal information. During the summer, residents proposed in earnest that the university publish the addresses and license-plate numbers of all off-campus students. (The license-plate information would allow residents to identify owners of illegally parked cars.) Supporters of the proposal also demand that students wishing to live in Georgetown sign waivers allowing parental notification in case of any off-campus student-code violations. This means that if students break any campus rules while off campus, neighborhood residents could tell the university, which could then tell the students' parents.

The irony of the situation is that, for all their complaining, Georgetown's homeowners are doing pretty well. The neighborhood looks as quaint as ever, and Georgetown property values have actually increased at nearly double the rate of other District properties over the last four years. The plague of off-campus students notwithstanding, Georgetown is not exactly a neighborhood in desperate decline. Which is a good thing. Imagine what its homeowners would do if it were. ■

Why feminism wins elections.

Sex Appeal

By JOHN B. JUDIS

FOR DECADES NOW, the Democrats have been afraid of feminism. In the 1980s, party leaders feared it was a political loser, since the women's movement had helped spark the traditionalist backlash that elected Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush. In the 1990s, even as the "gender gap" started handing the Democrats national elections, prominent party strategists denied that feminism deserved credit. The "gender gap," wrote the liberal Economic Policy Institute's Jeff Faux several years ago, "has been oversold." Echoed Al From, of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council: "The so-called gender gap is a false hope for Democrats." Even this year, Al Gore avoided making explicitly feminist appeals, speaking little about abortion rights and focusing on non-gender-specific issues like Social Security and prescription drugs.

But generic economic appeals can't explain why Democrats continue to pile up huge majorities among female voters. Contrary to the view of many party leaders, the Democrats' association with women's rights represents one of their greatest current strengths. And, contrary to what many in the party assume, that association isn't costing Democrats many votes among men.

While today people often take for granted women's support for Democrats, it is a relatively recent phenomenon. As Jo Freeman, author of *A Room at a Time: How Women Entered Party Politics*, has recounted, in the first decades after they won suffrage, women voted disproportionately Republican. In 1928, Herbert Hoover was even known as "the woman's candidate" and was endorsed by the National Women's Party. This pro-Republican gender gap persisted through the 1960 election—when women supported Richard Nixon 51 to 49 percent. "Wherever the consequences of women's suffrage have been studied," political scientists Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba wrote in 1963, "it would appear that women differ from men in their political behavior only in being somewhat more frequently apathetic, parochial, [and] conservative."

The authors might be accused of chauvinism. But it is true that before the '60s, when the majority of female voters were still homemakers, female voters were generally more religious, more wary of social change, and more conservative in their voting preferences than men. Many women backed Hoover in 1928, for instance, because he favored Prohibition.

But as women's professional status changed, so did their politics. In 1952, 65 percent of women were homemakers and 31 percent were in the workforce; by 1994, 18 percent were homemakers and 58 percent worked outside the home. And as women began to occupy the same jobs as men, they started to vote like them, too. From 1964 through 1976, men and women voted within just a few percentage points of each other. The gender gap had disappeared.

BUT IT WOULD come back. The same social changes that led women into the workplace also prompted a mass movement for women's rights. That movement demanded the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), abortion rights, and affirmative action for women. The National Organization for Women (NOW) was founded in 1966. And between 1972 and 1982, its membership rose more than tenfold, from 15,000 to 220,000.

If the two political parties had responded similarly to this new movement, the partisan gender balance of the '60s and '70s might have lasted. As political scientist Pippa Norris documents, that's what happened in Britain, where there are now only slight differences between men's and women's party preferences. But, in the United States, the feminist

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movement—with its close ties to the antiwar and civil rights movements—instinctively gravitated to the Democrats. In 1972, George McGovern welcomed the women's movement as part of his "change coalition." At that year's Democratic convention, the percentage of women delegates rose from 13 to 40 percent, and the Democrats endorsed the ERA.

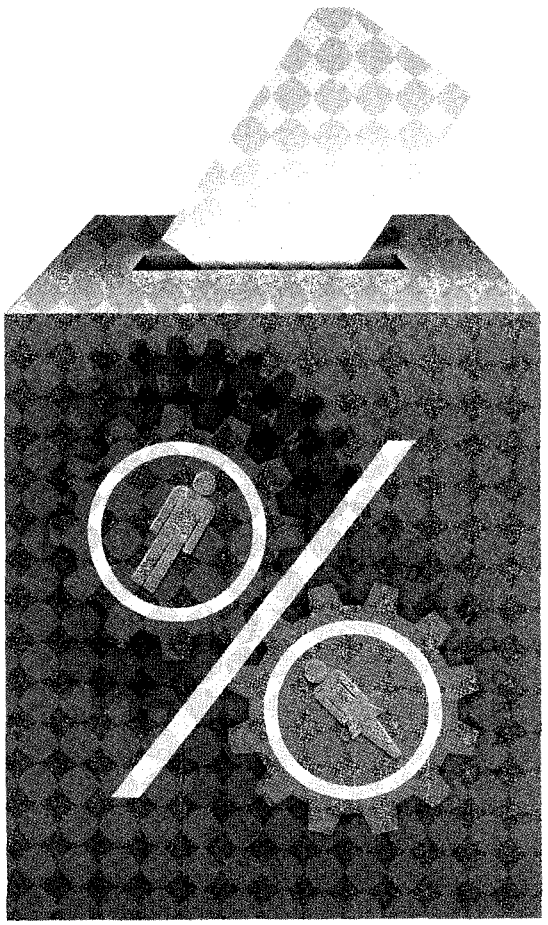
At first, Republicans also seemed receptive to the feminist agenda. As governor of California, Reagan signed what was at the time the nation's most liberal abortion law, and in 1972 and 1976 the GOP platform endorsed the ERA. But in 1980, as the Democrats fully embraced feminist issues—abortion rights, affirmative action, and the ERA—the Republicans, now under the sway of the Christian right, moved in the opposite direction. Not only did they reverse their earlier support for the ERA and abortion, but, as Tanya Melich writes in *The Republican War Against Women*, they also lionized women as homemakers and mothers for "maintaining the values of this country," while ignoring their role as workers—going so far as to oppose day-care funding.

NOT COINCIDENTALLY, IT was right around this time that the new gender gap appeared. According to a CBS/*New York Times* poll, men in 1980 supported Reagan over Jimmy Carter 54 to 37 percent, while women supported Reagan only 46 to 45 percent. In 1982, Mario Cuomo got 56 percent of the women's vote—but just 48 percent of the men's vote—in defeating Republican Lew Lehrman for the New York governorship. In 1984, Illinois Democratic Senate candidate Paul Simon defeated incumbent Republican Charles Percy, winning 55 percent of the women's vote and only 46 percent of the men's vote. Today, many commentators suggest that women vote Democratic because they support the party on economic issues. But, in fact, women began tilting toward the Democrats at the very moment the two parties' perspectives on feminism began to diverge.

Of course, that divergence wasn't cost-free for the Democrats. In 1984, NOW pressured Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale to pick Representative Geraldine Ferraro as his running mate. When Republicans pointed to Ferraro's selection as evidence of "special interests" controlling the Democratic Party, commentators and strategists began to see feminism as part of the Democrats' problem. And, to an extent, they were right.

But demography was on feminism's—and the Democrats'—side. While most women still don't describe themselves as "feminist"—a label many associate with '60s radicalism—growing numbers have come to identify with the movement's goals. As young women increasingly envisage their lives in terms of job and career rather than simply marriage, they have recoiled before Republican paeans to home and hearth. A new generation of women voters took umbrage at Republican attempts to eliminate affirmative action and overturn Title IX, which requires colleges to offer equal facilities to men and women. But what has drawn their ire most is the Republican crusade to ban abortion. As sociologist Kristin Luker recounts in *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, the struggle over abortion rights is not simply about whether the fetus is a living being. It is about rival conceptions of woman and family, woman as Adam's rib versus woman as autonomous equal, the family as patriarchal institution versus the family as place of shared work and responsibility.

Today, these issues, which were once confined to a feminist avant-garde, animate many women in the voting booth. On Election Day 2000, women supported Al Gore 54 to 42 percent. And, in twelve of the 19 states that Gore won, they provided his margin of victory. In particular, Gore won four key groups of women. Ninety-four percent of African American women voted for Gore, compared with 85 percent of African American men. Sixty-three percent of unmarried women backed Gore, compared with 48 percent of unmarried men. Fifty-seven percent of female college graduates (and 63 percent of those with advanced degrees) supported Gore, compared with 39 percent of male college graduates. And more than half the women voters earning over $75,000 per year backed Gore, compared with only 34 percent of their male counterparts.



Gore's support among African American women probably doesn't have much to do with feminism; they began to move to the Democratic Party well before the '80s, largely because of civil rights. But feminism clearly played a role in pushing the other groups into the Democratic fold. Consider a poll Stanley Greenberg (also Gore's pollster) conducted last month for the Campaign for America's Future, in which he asked 2,036 respondents to identity three reasons (out of 18 choices) they voted for Gore and three reasons (out of 15 choices) they had doubts about George W. Bush. (Ruy Teixeira helped me analyze Greenberg's raw data.) For white college-educated women and women making over $75,000

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per year, protecting the right to choose was their most important reason for supporting Gore and for having doubts about Bush. Among women overall, Bush's "opposition to a woman's right to choose" was the main reason for opposing him, and Gore's "support for a woman's right to choose" was the third-most-important reason for backing him.

GIVEN THESE STATISTICS, you'd think Democrats would see feminism as central to the party's electoral strategy. But most don't. In *America's Forgotten Majority*, Teixeira and Joel Rogers's recent, influential book on the state of the Democratic Party, feminism is barely mentioned. Teixeira and Rogers are primarily concerned with the loss of white working-class voters. Other Democrats focus more narrowly on closing the "guy gap" among white male voters. Implicit in their arguments is the idea that the gender gap is zero-sum: Whatever you do to appeal to women voters will drive men away.

But that's an oversimplification. Working-class white men began fleeing the Democratic Party in 1968—primarily over civil rights, not feminism—and they continue to be repelled by Democratic support for gun control and by the party's identification with minority causes such as affirmative action. In Greenberg's post-election polls, for instance, relatively few whites cite Gore's support for abortion rights as their reason for opposing him. In fact, the remarkable thing about a feminist-based appeal is that, combined with liberal economics, it may contribute to a lasting majority of women *and* men. Bill Clinton certainly understood that. In 1992, his campaign revolved around the slogans "It's the economy, stupid" and "The Year of the Woman." In this election, Democratic Senate and gubernatorial candidates won majorities among both women and men in California, Washington, Hawaii, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Delaware, and Wisconsin.

What's more, there is reason to believe women's support will bring even more dividends in the next decade. More and more women fall into the demographic categories most strongly predisposed to vote Democratic. In 1982, women were awarded 50 percent of all bachelor's degrees; today, they receive 57 percent. It is estimated that by 2008 women undergraduates will outnumber their male classmates by 9.2 million to 6.9 million. And women now vote more frequently than men. In 1976, turnout among women was 0.8 percent lower than among men; by 1996, it was 2.7 percent higher. Among voters age 20 to 24 it was 5.4 percent higher.

And it's not just that the number of college-educated, working women is increasing. As more women go to work and to college and as family arrangements become more fluid and flexible, the older view of women and family that conservatives trumpet will find fewer adherents—and those it does find will grow increasingly shrill. Republicans will face a difficult choice. Unless they jettison the socially conservative base they gained during the '80s, they will increasingly be stuck on the losing side of the national political debate. That's a good reason for Democrats to take heart, even as the dismal events in Florida draw to a dismal conclusion. ■

Why blacks want Gore to keep fighting.

Race Not Run

By MICHAEL CROWLEY

A SURPRISING DEBATE is under way on Black Entertainment Television's website: Has Al Gore sold out his black supporters? On BET.com's public message boards, several angry posters want to know why Gore and his allies have spent the last month fixated on chads and butterfly ballots while remaining largely mute about allegations that crude bigotry prevented thousands of blacks from voting in Florida. "He sure steered clear of this fight," a post titled "Silent Al" seethes. "If Al Gore cannot find the heart to stand up against injustice committed against black people . . . then he deserves to lose Florida by the slimmest of margins." Adds another: "Blacks have been abandoned by the Democratic Party to fight their own battle in the courts and in the streets."

And the grumbling isn't confined to online cranks. In the last couple of weeks, mainstream black leaders have increasingly complained about the Gore campaign's silence on the racial dimension of Florida's electoral mess. Outside the Supreme Court last week, Jesse Jackson angrily declared that Democrats as well as Republicans have refused to touch the "third rail" of race. "Both of them are discussing chads," he roared, "[but] those chads have faces on them. . . . Chads are about 85 percent African American!" NAACP President Kweisi Mfume bitterly swiped at the frosty attitude of Attorney General Janet Reno and the "Just Ice" Department (get it?) toward allegations of voter intimidation and harassment. "Everything about this is racial," concludes South Carolina Representative James Clyburn, chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus. But, Clyburn laments, "everybody gets scared of the race thing every time you bring it up."

Indeed, even as Republicans accuse Gore of being willing to do anything to win the White House, African Americans, presumed to be among the vice president's most steadfast allies, are criticizing him for not doing enough—for refusing to play the most volatile card of all, race.

Gore certainly wasn't wary of playing the race card during the campaign. In the final days before the November vote, Gore stumped furiously in African American precincts, preaching in black churches, hanging out with Queen Latifah, adamantly defending affirmative action—even linking George W. Bush's judicial philosophy to the days when the Constitution counted a slave as three-fifths of a person. And, on Election Day, the strategy paid off: Black turnout set records nationwide. In Florida, turnout was up nearly two-thirds from 1996.

But when the Gore team shifted from campaign mode to recount mode, its calculations about the wisdom of race-based appeals shifted as well. Although many of the black

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leaders and media figures upon whom Gore relied before November 7 claim bigotry lies at the root of the Florida mess, the Gore campaign has repeatedly refused to endorse their argument. The campaign's top officials—including Warren Christopher, Bill Daley, and Joe Lieberman—have kept virtually mum on the race question. Gore himself said nothing about the race charges until this week, when, in response to a reporter's question, he cautiously said he was "troubled" by them but had "no knowledge of those activities." There's even evidence that Democrats have actively tried to mute the public agitating of black leaders: *The New York Times* reported that jittery Gore aides pressured Jackson to lower his profile when, in the days after the election, he led noisy protests in Palm Beach.

All of which makes some sense. As Gore walks a public opinion tightrope, casting his lot with deeply polarizing public figures could be deadly. In a recent Fox News poll, 48 percent of respondents said rallies by Jackson and Al Sharpton in Florida hurt Gore's cause; only 21 percent said they helped. And white politicos react with equal hostility to the suggestion that racism underlay the Florida voting snafu. After Massachusetts Representative Ed Markey casually noted on "Hardball" last week that it was "minorities primarily" whose votes weren't counted in Miami-Dade County, South Carolina Representative Lindsey Graham went nuclear: "Now we're all racists?" he cried. Host Chris Matthews demanded of Markey, "Why is that relevant?" And, minutes later, former Jimmy Carter aide Pat Caddell flatly declared that "Mr. Markey just made one of the most racist statements in history."

For Team Gore, the downside of emphasizing race is considerable. And the upside is small, because, even if true, the racism charges probably can't be redressed quickly enough to change Florida's outcome. "It takes too long to bring voting-rights cases. It's a very long and involved process," says David Bositis of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a think tank specializing in African American issues. "The Gore people want to focus on winning the election."

AND THAT, IN the end, may be what has upset so many African Americans. For many black activists, exposing the racism they believe marked Florida's vote is more important than whether Gore actually makes it to the White House. When Sharpton led a march in front of the Supreme Court building last week, he helped carry a huge banner that read, THIS IS MORE ABOUT SELMA THAN ABOUT BUSH OR GORE.

And that puts Gore in a bind. If the Florida Supreme Court rejects his appeal of Leon County Circuit Judge N. Sanders Sauls's decision, Gore will face enormous pressure to concede from white Democrats who believe he can no longer win. But many blacks want Gore to fight on—precisely to prove that he cares about the principle rather than simply his personal ambition. If Gore concedes too early, Clyburn warns, "You'll never get [African Americans'] vote again. The only way to keep the Democratic vote engaged is for [blacks] to see in us that even if it looks like a cause that you can't win, you still have to fight for a cause that is right."

Ironically, then, the very thing that could keep Gore viable with white voters in 2004—an early and gracious withdrawal—could hurt him with blacks. On BET's website, the sniping has already begun. In an ominous post titled "Does Gore like blacks?" one person charges that the vice president refuses to shake hands with black Secret Service agents in his detail. Another wonders why Gore didn't kiss Oprah Winfrey when he appeared on her show in September, adding that "he is reported to have washed his hands directly after leaving the stage." For Gore, the danger is that if he bows to political reality, black voters might wash their hands of him. ■

Solving the real voting scandal.

Poll Tax

By KATIE ISENBERG

ALMOST FROM THE moment he arrived in South Florida the day after the election, Jesse Jackson has been in rhetorical overdrive: "This is a replay of Selma, Alabama, all over again"; "This is not about chads; it's about targeted racism"; "African Americans were targeted to be disenfranchised"; "There was race-targeting—voting while black.... This is too massive and significant not to have been planned, which makes it all the more sinister."

Typical Jackson hyperbole? Yes and no. Jackson is wrong that Florida's electoral fiasco constitutes a "sinister" case of "targeted racism," with whites systematically setting out to disenfranchise minority voters. But he's right that a striking

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number of the votes not counted in Florida were cast by minorities. That's because punch-card machines, which have introduced "chads" into the American lexicon and which often produce ballots that can't be counted, are disproportionately used in poor, minority communities. The scandal of what happened in Florida on November 7 isn't that white election officials conspired to throw out black votes; it's that the deep inequities between the voting infrastructures in rich and poor areas made it so they didn't need to. Under our system, a dramatically disproportionate percentage of poor voters have their votes thrown out every year—not just in Florida but all over the country.

In America today, between 1 and 2 percent of ballots cast at the polls never get their presidential preference counted. Known as "drop-off," this discrepancy has several possible causes, principal among them "overvoting" (two or more votes cast for the same office) and "undervoting" (which can result from voter abstention or from a ballot tabulator reading an insufficiently marked ballot as blank).

The good news is that technology can make overvoting and undervoting much less likely. ATM-style touch-screen machines can be programmed to prevent voters from indicating more than one choice per office. Optical-scan voting systems, which tabulate ink or pencil marks on SAT-style, paper ballots, can be programmed to easily identify overvoted or undervoted ballots—and then spit them out, so voters may be able to correct their mistakes. These new machines can reduce the number of uncounted ballots to practically zero: In Florida's Leon County, which uses optical-scan tabulators, this year's presidential drop-off was a mere 0.1 percent.

The bad news is that the high-tech machines don't come cheap. Touch-screen machines can cost up to $5,000 each, and in poorer cities with large populations and small election budgets, they're often out of reach. Instead, populous areas—like Los Angeles, Illinois's Cook County, and Atlanta's Fulton County—generally rely on old-fashioned punch-card machines, which cost as little as $250 apiece. And, not surprisingly, much higher percentages of their votes go uncounted. In 1992, for instance, a study by *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported a drop-off in Fulton County of more than 11,500 presidential votes, or 4.3 percent, largely concentrated in low-education, high-poverty, high-minority urban areas. And this year news reports put Cook County's combined undervote and overvote total at 122,000, while nearby McHenry County, an affluent, predominantly white area that uses optical-scan technology, threw out only twelve ballots due to overvoting. Says Kim Brace, president of the Washington, D.C.-based elections consulting firm Election Data Services, "It really is a case of economics."

In fact, about the only way the poor can enjoy the same certainty as the wealthy that their votes will be counted is if, by a quirk of geography, they're part of the same tax base. Consider Silicon Valley's San Mateo County, which includes such affluent havens as Woodside, Atherton, Hillsborough, and Portola Valley—as well as East Palo Alto, a poorer community infamous for its high murder rates. In 1992 San Mateo retired its old-style lever machines in favor of state-of-the-art optical-scan tabulators (it now has 525 of them, at $3,500 a pop), as well as touch-screen machines available for pre-Election Day voting ($2,200 each). Voters in East Palo Alto cast their votes on the same machines as voters in Woodside. This year, only 0.38 percent of the ballots cast in the poorer city contained overvotes for president.

Fortunately, the poor may not have to depend on the serendipities of geography forever. Even before the Florida disaster, many jurisdictions had begun funding upgrades for their voting systems. On September 29, Fulton County's election board issued a capital-improvements memo decrying its "outdated election equipment ... originally purchased in 1964" and proposing an allocation of up to $3 million for conversion to an optical-scan system. And Pennsylvania's Philadelphia County, which uses lever machines that Deputy City Commissioner Edward Schulgen calls "iron behemoth[s]," is negotiating to purchase 3,500 touch-screen machines at a cost of more than $20 million. The California legislature is considering two separate proposals, one for $230 million and one for $300 million, to help counties defray the cost of upgrading from punch cards to optical-scan or touch-screen systems.

But, while a complete overhaul of voting equipment in poorer counties would represent a vast improvement, a onetime expenditure would ameliorate the problem only temporarily. In addition to being cheap to purchase, punch-card machines are cheap to maintain. By contrast, like any computer technology, touch-screen machines need regular software upgrades—which can require costly licensing agreements. For example, Global Election Systems charges fees of about 18 percent per year on touch-screen and optical-scan software prices of $50,000 to $250,000—depending, once again, on the size of the county and the number of machines involved. Many American cities, with small tax bases and competing claims on municipal funds, can't afford that. All of which brings up an obvious question, one the Florida crisis should surely be raising on Capitol Hill: If the federal government helps poor communities police their streets, teach their children, and house their residents, shouldn't Washington also help ensure that their citizens have an equal opportunity to vote? ■

A solution for Seminole County.

Absent Minded

By GREGG EASTERBROOK

WITH HIS LEGAL options dwindling, Al Gore, at a White House news conference on Tuesday, seized on the absentee-ballot mischief in Seminole and Martin Counties—where Republican volunteers corrected party members' incomplete applications for absentee ballots, while Democrats were not afforded the same opportunity. "That doesn't seem fair to me," Gore said. But, during the same press conference, he twice noted that

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he was not a party to lawsuits seeking to throw out these absentee ballots. After insisting in South Florida that every vote be counted, Gore couldn't easily embrace lawsuits based on essentially the opposite principle.

Commentators pounced on Gore for trying to have it both ways. "It was unfortunate that Vice President Al Gore equivocated," *The New York Times* declared in an editorial titled "The Sideshow Over Absentees." "[H]is refusal to forcefully call on his local supporters to drop the suit, or to rule out benefiting from its outcome, represents a failure of statesmanship on his part."

The critics are right to accuse Gore of vacillating. But they are wrong to dismiss the Seminole and Martin County claims. The vice president's newfound interest in these counties is entirely defensible. Someday analysts may wonder why Gore spent the past few weeks pouring his legal and political resources into contesting the recounts in Miami-Dade and Palm Beach, when his stronger case has always been more than a hundred miles to the north.

As the courts are making clear, the Gore team never had much of a shot at successfully contesting the recounts in Palm Beach and Miami-Dade. Judges were never likely to take upon themselves the burden of deciphering "dimpled" chads. Maybe most of the dimpled ballots were intended for Gore, but, for all we will ever know, they were votes for Warren G. Harding: A spoiled ballot is a spoiled ballot. And it was never likely that any judge would factor the two counties' partial recounts into the official total. No state's laws permit certification of partial tallies; otherwise, officials could recount only precincts that favor one side, then call a halt and certify the partial result. Even before Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris's November 26 certification of the total, the vice president's lawyers had already lost cases protesting Miami-Dade's decision to stop its manual recount and demanding that Palm Beach count dimpled chads. Shouldn't this have persuaded Gore that angling for still more recounts was not a dazzling strategy?

Meanwhile, the Gore campaign kept its distance from the lawsuits in Seminole and Martin Counties. Legal observers, after all, had declared those lawsuits doubly doomed. First, even if there were election-law violations in Seminole and Martin, those violations were assumed to be technicalities, since the funny business had been on the ballot applications, not the ballots themselves. And the Florida Supreme Court had already said that "hypertechnicalities" should not determine an election. Second, the lawsuits asked that all of both counties' absentee votes be thrown out, a cure worse than the disease.

Both those criticisms are wrong. In Seminole County, according to the plaintiffs' briefs, Republican workers sat in the elections office for as long as ten days, adding verification codes onto absentee-ballot requests from Republicans. In Martin County, according to the plaintiffs' briefs, Republicans were allowed to take ballot requests containing errors off the premises, correct the errors, and bring them back. Yet in both counties, the allegations continue, Democratic officials were not given the same opportunity to fix their constituents' ballot paperwork. If true, this is official favoritism for one party over another—and that's no technicality, that's classic election fraud.

And what about the remedy? The Seminole and Martin lawsuits demand that all Bush and Gore absentee votes in those counties be discarded, since there's no way to tell which particular ballot applications were completed by Republican volunteers. Since absentee voters in the two counties cast 16,300 votes for Bush and 8,688 for Gore—a 7,612-vote Bush advantage, more than ten times the governor's 537-vote certified margin in Florida—that would hand the White House to the vice president. Surely this would be unfair to those Bush voters who cast perfectly valid absentee ballots, unaware of the shenanigans in the elections offices.

But there is a potential remedy, first proposed in a somewhat different form by Robert Wright in *Slate*, that avoids this unfairness. Why not order Seminole and Martin County election officials to track down those Democrats whose absentee-ballot requests were rejected because they lacked the same codes added to Republican requests, hand those Democrats ballots, and let them vote? Maybe there won't be enough rejected Democratic requests for absentee ballots to make a difference. But maybe there will be. Either way, the outcome would be fair.

And not only fair but constitutional. Since there would be written evidence that these Democrats had first attempted to vote on November 7, as Congress directed, this remedy wouldn't constitute a constitutionally prohibited revote. Americans are rightly suspicious of the Gore team's pleading about dimples and chads. But they might be more sympathetic to his outrage at a case in which special voting favors were granted to some voters and not to others. If Gore switches course now, he might look desperate. That's because he *is* desperate. Perhaps if he'd focused on Seminole and Martin from the start, he wouldn't be. ■

Why no one wants the Florida struggle to end.

Tit for Tat

By Ryan Lizza

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

Yesterday they were body-slammed by Leon County Circuit Judge N. Sanders Sauls. Tomorrow they file their brief before the Florida Supreme Court: their last chance. It's late on Tuesday night and the Gore legal team is almost frighteningly focused. "The sense of mission is clearly still there," says Gore lawyer Joe Sandler. Says another Gore attorney: "It definitely takes its toll. But, on the other hand, we are right on the law, and that is recommitting everyone. Everyone here is a true believer." Gore's lawyers insist they saw the Sauls massacre coming. One quotes Mitchell Berger, one of Gore's top Florida attorneys, as saying, "We expected Sauls to completely fuck us. We just thought he would do it a lot earlier."

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At 11:45 a.m. the next day, about eight lawyers, one carrying a box of documents, file out of the Gore legal offices at 211 Call Street in downtown Tallahassee and into a gold-colored Chrysler Town and Country minivan with tinted windows. The van whisks them a few blocks south to the Florida Supreme Court, where they are met by a phalanx of reporters and cameramen. The lawyers hop out and march into the courthouse, where they file, a few minutes before the noon deadline, what they insist is their final legal appeal in this contested election. Gore's two top recount lawyers, Jack Young and Chris Sautter, have been put on alert, ready to spring into action the moment the Supreme Court orders the undervotes counted. "I'm on deck with a complete team of people to get back into the recount as soon as they drop the flag," says Young. "We can start in a matter of minutes. We've got the computers and everything all ready." "This," says one of Gore's lawyers, "is our last stand."

BUT ACROSS THE street from the courthouse, in the plaza separating Florida's old nineteenth-century capitol building from its new 1970s-style capitol building, Election 2000 doesn't feel like it's coming to a close at all. In fact, the thousands of black and union Democrats who have descended on the capitol to protest the Republican-controlled legislature's effort to appoint Bush's electors seem to be just getting started. The recount war, which itself might be seen as a response to impeachment, has from its inception followed an escalating cycle of tit for tat. The Gore campaign hired Warren Christopher; the Bush campaign responded with James Baker. The Bush campaign deployed congressional Republicans; the Gore campaign deployed congressional Democrats. The Bush campaign orchestrated angry mobs in Miami; now the Democrats have a mob of their own, in Tallahassee. Stealing a page from the GOP's playbook, the Democrats have bused in demonstrators from around the state. They have printed T-shirts and signs (THEY HAVE NO SHAME). They have set up a website (*www.countourvotes.com*) and have asked their partisans to wear orange ribbons to protest the legislature's proposed special session.

That special session is the protest's proximate cause, but, when the demonstration convenes on Wednesday at 3 p.m., the session doesn't seem likely to take place. As one union organizer tells me, "This was supposed to coincide with the supposed special session—which is no longer so supposed." (An hour after the protest ends, as fate would have it, the Republican legislative leaders announce they are going ahead with the session after all—which means either that the protest was prophetic or that it didn't work.)

But, in a broader sense, the rally really isn't about the Florida legislature at all. Nor is it about the legal battles being feverishly waged across the street. They are just small parts of the much larger narrative that the protesters spend the afternoon elaborating. Fundamentally, the narrative is about race. Black voter mobilization in Florida was the biggest in the country. There was a 65 percent increase in black turnout over the last presidential election, and Gore received more than 90 percent of that vote, more than Bill Clinton ever got. Blacks actually voted at a higher percentage than their share of the voting-age population. African American leaders came so close to unparalleled power in a presidential administration that they can practically taste it. And now they have to make sure their constituents understand that the struggle for power is about more than just Al Gore. As one black voter, Levy Smith, says, "A lot of blood was shed" by participants in the civil rights movement to get blacks the right to vote. "We got to pick up where they left off." Jesse Jackson declares in his speech, "This is about Selma."

Playing the role of Bull Connor are Florida's Cubans. One of Jackson's biggest applause lines comes when, in assailing the Justice Department's slow reaction to complaints from black voters, he declares indignantly, "They fought harder on Elián!" Several blacks in the crowd bitterly note that Miami-Dade's Cuban precincts have more modern election equipment than its black ones. When a speaker mentions Miami-Dade Mayor Alex Penelas, the crowd begins to boo.

THEN THERE'S JEB BUSH, a man reviled by black Floridians even before November 7 for his efforts to repeal affirmative action. Florida Democrats hoped that by knocking off W., they could hurt Jeb. As one prominent Florida Democrat, State Senator Buddy Dyer, told me before the election, "If Gore wins, and wins Florida, then Jeb is severely wounded." But now Democrats believe that W.'s illegitimate victory might be even worse for Jeb than a Gore win, and they can smell blood. Florida Democratic Party Chairman Bob Poe, in town to testify in the Seminole County absentee-ballot case, tells me a couple of hours before the rally that, no matter what happens, the Democrats have damaged Jeb enough to topple him when he comes up for reelection in 2002. Poe doesn't seem dispirited at all; in fact, he sounds positively gleeful.

On the other side of the capitol, a much smaller, hastily-thrown-together Republican rally is also under way. At the Democratic rally, speakers blare Aretha Franklin's "Respect." Over here, they're playing country music. The protesters are holding up signs reading ENOUGH IS ENOUGH, and they're chanting "President Bush."

In the middle of the rally, several Bushies decide to see what's happening on the other side. They cross the plaza separating the capitols and approach the gray metal railings enclosing the Democratic protest. But, as they try to enter, they are met by a phalanx of burly representatives of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, who block their access. Republican after Republican is turned away, until somehow a grandfatherly-looking Bushie in his sixties manages to slip through. He's instantly surrounded by perhaps a dozen black teenagers. Pressing right up to his face, they shout over and over, "Bush gotta go! Bush gotta go!" Finally, a member of the capitol police intervenes and rescues the man, escorting him beyond the barricade. But, remarkably, the Bushie isn't intimidated. He wants to go back in. "I was accosted by a group of people who were thugs," he fumes at the policeman. "You have allowed them to do this to me." And he takes out his camera to document the offense. But the cop just puts his hand in front of his face and replies nonchalantly, "Take it to court." ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Irregularities

SADISM—THE WORD itself—acquires new meanings through the years. Peter Weiss, the author of *Marat/Sade*, said that his play is Marxist. In that play, set in the mental hospital where Sade is confined, other inmates perform a play that he has written, and this inner play has political bite. Now comes **Quills** (Fox Searchlight), a play about Sade by Doug Wright that he has adapted for the screen, and Wright makes the imprisoned author a civil rights hero in a struggle against literary censorship. The Weiss view, in Peter Brook's celebrated production and in Brook's film of his production, had ironic strength. Wright's approach is a bit harder to credit: Sade sanctified as a libertarian martyr is a strain.

Which Philip Kaufman, the director, intensifies. His film, set in the hospital at Charenton from 1794 onward, is thrust at us with such fabricated energy, with such a cascade of close-ups and whispered dialogue, that it immediately puts us on guard. We soon ask ourselves if the film deserves all this breathy hugger-mugger, and soon we get the sad answer.

Kaufman, now 64, has had a roller-coaster career. Though he began in 1964, he has made only a handful of films, varied but not always sound. *The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid* was an anti-cliché film about Jesse James that had an almost tangible texture. *The White Dawn* was about the frozen North and, as art work, never thawed. *The Right Stuff*, about astronauts, showed that Kaufman could make a mainstream success. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, my favorite of the lot, found a film equivalent for Milan Kundera's café-conversation tone. *Henry and June*, poorly cast, pawed ineffectually at Henry Miller's Paris of 1931.

Now Kaufman comes to Sade. Unsteady historical films, especially those set more than a century ago, especially if about famous people, fall into one group or another. On the one hand, waxworks idolatry (like most TV history); on the other, the *Quills* sort, pictures so eager to avoid the waxworks look that the frantic these-people-burped-just-like-us approach distorts the picture's balance. No. 2 for Kaufman. In frame after frame, scene after scene, Kaufman is so patently striving to keep his film from being a stuffed historical turkey—despite torture chambers, murky cells, buxom laundresses, silky prison governor, and so forth—that the effort obtrudes.

Sade is in this asylum-prison because of his sexual writings and will stay there until his death in 1814. (The film omits that this aristocrat and former army officer had been previously imprisoned not for his writing but for his debauched behavior.) His writings are smuggled out of prison to his publisher bit by bit—sections of his novel *Justine* (which in fact was published before 1794). The young prison laundress looks for the pages in his dirty bed linen, then passes them to a horseman outside the Charenton gate, and the book is published to immense success. That a young woman of her station (a) is literate in the 1790s, (b) risks her neck to help Sade, and (c) reads erotic portions of the novel aloud to rejoice in Sade's frankness are three more of the improbabilities.

But the film's basic trouble is not the departure from fact, it is the intrinsic conflict between the movie-ness of the screenplay and the frenzied anti-cliché directorial style. The picture is further hobbled by Geoffrey Rush's disappointing performance of Sade. Rush impressed as the pathological pianist in *Shine* and in his Elizabethan roles in *Elizabeth* and *Shakespeare in Love*—he has had classical training—but here he is hollow and weak. As with Joan Allen in *The Contender*, we are conscious throughout of a good minor performer struggling with a major role and never quite mastering it.

The securely talented Kate Winslet is by now experienced at dealing with poor scripts: after *Hideous Kinky* and *Holy Smoke*, Winslet has no trouble with this Charenton laundress. How well she deserves better films, and needs them. Joaquin Phoenix as the harried hospital chaplain is once again a pleasant surprise. He is one of those welcome actors with the gift of quick audience connection.

Michael Caine is now an oddity. He took a quasi-holiday between 1992 and 1997 and returned a different man. Before that break, he was one of the best of English-speaking film actors. Since his return, in such films as *Little Voice* and *The Cider House Rules*, he has been not much more than adequate. As the doctor-superintendent of Charenton, Caine is quite competent, which is a sorry comment on an actor whose fine edge used to incise his performances on the screen.

Throughout *Quills*, metaphors are literalized—Sade, with every fingertip bandaged because, deprived of ink, is writing with his own blood; Sade's tongue amputated and visible in a jar—but the screenplay's worst offense is that it very nearly converts a deliberately dangerous soul into a card-carrying member of the ACLU.

Moon Shadow (Promofest) is about a quite different sort of mental institution—in Sicily today. It was written and directed by Alberto Simone, an Italian psychotherapist, and it concerns his approach to therapy; but it is done so compassionately yet so reticently that it goes quickly past the didactic to the humane. Occasionally a professional in another field makes a fiction film about his interests and does it so affectingly that he assails our beliefs in film professionalism. The French lawyer André Cayatte did it some decades ago with a number of pictures on legal questions—notably *We Are All Murderers*, a soul-chilling attack on capital punishment. Simone is not quite in the Cayatte class, but after his medical training, he worked in TV and now has applied this later technical experience to his prior concerns—and has made a film that earns much more than respect.

Lorenzo, a scientist who lives in Rome, inherits a villa in Sicily where he was born. He sees that the villa needs extensive repair before he can sell it, which he plans to do. He engages a local construction boss, Salvatore, who comes to work with two young assistants. The behavior of the two young men leads Lorenzo to discover that, though eager to work, they are both inmates of a local mental home. With Salvatore's help, Lorenzo visits the home, meets the head doctor, Titto, and is fascinated by Titto's approach to treatment. (It can be summarized—inadequately but briefly—as deinstitutionalization, or Democratic Psychiatry.) In time, because of his involvements here, Lorenzo not only changes his mind about selling his villa, he alters his criteria for living.

Thus *Moon Shadow* has some cousinly relationship to *The Wind Will Carry Us*, Kiarostami's recent film about a city professional whose life is affected by his stay in a remote village. Simone's film

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shares with the Iranian one a risk of the simplistic, a reduction of city and country to Soiled and Stainless, but it doesn't approach Kiarostami in depth or visual beauty. Where *Moon Shadow* succeeds more firmly than the other is in the acting. The Turkish-French actor Tcheky Karyo, who plays Lorenzo, has in the past mostly been asked to provide primary colors in various French films. Here, in Italian, he seems to settle in, to spread himself, to reveal a range that he hadn't previously been permitted to explore. His resonance as a human being overcomes any suggestion of pat conversion in Lorenzo.

But the film rests, comfortably, sufficiently, on Nino Manfredi as Salvatore. Manfredi, throughout the postwar Italian years, did coarsely what Ugo Tognazzi was doing superbly, portraying common men of various sorts in uncommon straits. Tognazzi acted, Manfredi demonstrated (in *Bread and Chocolate* and *Down and Dirty*, for instance). But here, perhaps because of his respect for the screenplay, or Simone's clear sincerity, or simply because he is older and wiser, Manfredi is quietly persuasive. His Salvatore is not a stock rustic sage but a man taught by experience, not an angel of patience but a man who has been burned by impatience, a man who has seen what he can expect from life, all of which has made him gentle with fellow voyagers. It may be a contravention of what Simone wanted, but I will remember Manfredi's Salvatore more vividly than anything else in this film. ■

Beyond identity.

Other People

By AMARTYA SEN

I.

GOETHE TOLD ECKERMANN, "I do not know myself, and God forbid that I should." Ignorance of oneself is not particularly uncommon, though it is seldom perceived and acknowledged with such clarity. But there is a prior issue: how does such a failure of self-knowledge arise? This is an issue of much complexity, and I shall confine my comments to only one specific aspect of it. I shall be concerned in particular with the difficulties in acquiring self-knowledge that arise from the intricacies of our relations with other people. Our knowledge of ourselves must include how our concerns and our priorities are influenced by the presence of others. For we are strongly influenced by others, even though the tacitness of the connections may often make the influence less than transparent.

Oscar Wilde made the enigmatic claim that "most people are other people." This may sound like one of Wilde's preposterous exaggerations, but he defended the view with some cogency: "Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation." We are influenced to an amazing extent by the company that we keep and the people with whom we identify, and our lack of clarity about many of our beliefs and their underlying reasoning may arise, at least partly, from the fact that they reflect the views and the judgments of others who have—perceptibly or imperceptibly—influenced us. When partially articulated hatreds, in Kosovo or Bosnia or Rwanda or East Timor, spread like wildfire, the nature and the exact foundations of the abhorrence may be far less clear than the resolute call for fierce and violent deeds. A lack of self-knowledge and the absence of self-criticism often derives from our attachment to one group of people, while spelling brutal disaster for another group of people.

Our identification with others in one group or another can have a strong influence on our thoughts and our feelings, and through them on our deeds as well. This, broadly speaking, is the subject of "social identity," which elicits much interest and is often championed in the contemporary intellectual world, particularly in the so-called communitarian literature. In many recent social, political, and moral investigations, social identity has become a frequently invoked concept. My aim, therefore, is to put a little pressure on the idea, to examine critically the notion of social identity and its implications, real or imagined.

The importance of the idea of identity can scarcely be doubted. Our relation with other people is greatly influenced by the way we identify with some and not with others. I wish to argue, however, that the nature and the reach of identity-based reasoning are often oversimplified, and that an inadequately scrutinized intellectual framework in which the notion of identity is situated can contribute greatly to confounding our relations with other people. The subject, I would submit, is not only of analytical interest; it is also of central relevance in understanding a diverse basket of practical problems, as varied as violence in the former Yugoslavia or in Rwanda, the growing appeal of fundamentalism in Asia and Africa, racial discrimination in America or anti-immigrant violence in Western Europe, and even the current controversies surrounding the idea of being British in a multiethnic Britain.

II.

OTHER PEOPLE: THE phrase can be interpreted in different ways, invoking different contrasts. It can refer to, not *me*, but "other people"; not *my* people, but "other people"; not *this* group of people, but "other people." All three interpretations have a bearing on identity-based thinking.

The first contrast (not me, but other people) can be seen to be something like an "identity base line," by distinguishing an individual, as seen by herself, from all others. As far as interpersonal connections go, it invites reflection on how we relate to other people in general, without distinction. Indeed, a good deal of contemporary moral and political philosophy concentrates precisely on the way we may think about—and even identify with—all others. Kant's famous dictum, "So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only," makes a strong demand on our concern for all others—without exception. Insofar as this is interpreted within a concept of identity, it is, at least in one sense, the broadest identity that we can have: the identity with all human beings.

I use the qualifying phrase "in one sense" because even broader characterizations can be invoked if we want our concern or our identity to stretch to other

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animals as well. "Others" could include "other sentient beings," and not just "other people." Quite a few of the moral issues encountered in the Jatakas, which are so central to Buddhist ethics, involve one's relation with other members of the animal kingdom. While I do not pursue this question further here, I must put on record my belief that in understanding the demands of social ethics, we cannot dismiss the claims of other living beings as if they did not exist.

In the human-centered framework, universal coverage includes all other human beings. This universalist position can be contrasted with more limited structures of ethical or political thinking that are confined, in one way or another, to particular groups of people with the members of which the person identifies. The difficult questions to be faced arise only after the basic relevance of group identities has been acknowledged. And those questions include, I would argue, at least three elementary ones.

First, must our social identity be linked exactly to one group? Why not several groups with which one identifies in one way or another? Let me call this the issue of "plural identity." Second, do we choose our identities, or do we simply discover them? This is the issue of "identity choice." Third, how should we consider the claims of other people—not just the ones with whom we identify—in determining what would be acceptable or reasonable behavior? This issue of transcendence I shall call "beyond identity."

LET ME BEGIN with the notion of "plural identity." This is not a new subject, of course. Many writers have discussed with much clarity the limitation of the presumption in identity politics and in identity-based philosophy that a person belongs only to one community or only to one group. Surely any claim of exclusivity of this kind cannot but be manifestly absurd. We invoke group identities of various kinds in many disparate contexts, and the language of our communications reflects this diversity in the different ways in which phrases such as "my people" are used. A person can be a Nigerian, an Ibo, a British citizen, a resident of the United States, a woman, a philosopher, a vegetarian, a Christian, a painter, and a great believer in aliens who ride on UFOs—each of these groups giving the person a particular identity that may be invoked in particular contexts.

Sometimes an identity group—the idea of "my people"—may have a very fleeting and highly contingent existence. The American comedian Mort Sahl is said to have responded to the tedium of Otto Preminger's four-hour-long film, *Exodus* (about the migration of Jewish refugees to Palestine and the creation of the Jewish state) by demanding on behalf of his fellow sufferers: "Otto, let my people go!" That group of tormented filmgoers certainly did have a reason for fellow feeling; but one can easily see the contrast between such an ephemeral group and the well-defined and genuinely tyrannized community led by Moses, who addressed that famous entreaty to Pharaoh.

There are many groups to which a person belongs, and the assumption of a unique identity helps to generate what K. Anthony Appiah has called an "imperialism of identity." In pursuing this critical analysis further, it is useful to distinguish between "competing" identities and "noncompeting" identities. The different groups may belong to the same category, dealing with the same kind of membership (such as citizenship), or they may belong to different categories (such as citizenship, class, gender, and profession). In the former case, there is some "competition" between different groups within the same category, and thus between the different identities with which they are associated. But when we deal with groups classified on different bases (such as profession and citizenship), there may be no real competition between them as far as "belonging" is concerned.

Still, even though these noncompeting identities are not involved in any territorial dispute as far as belonging is concerned, they can compete with each other for our attention and our priorities. When one has to do one thing or another, the loyalties can conflict between giving priority to race, or religion, or political commitments, or professional obligations, or friendship. And in such a context, to be guided by only one particular identity (say, race) oblivious of others can be disastrously limiting. As Appiah illustrates the point, "racial identity can be the basis of resistance to racism," but "let

Christmas Ballad

for Evgenii Rein, with love

There floats in an abiding gloom,
among immensities of brick,
a little boat of night: it seems
to sail through Alexander Park.
It's just a lonely streetlamp, though,
a yellow rose against the night,
for lovers strolling down below
the busy street.

There floats in an abiding gloom
a drone of bees: men drunk, asleep.
In the dark capital a lone
tourist takes another snap.
Now out on to Ordynka turns
a taxi-cab, with sickly faces;
dead men lean into the arms
of the low houses.

There floats in an abiding gloom
a poet in sorrow; over here
a round-faced man sells kerosene,
the sad custodian of his store.
Along a dull deserted street
an old Lothario hurries. Soon
the midnight-riding newlyweds
sail through the gloom.

There floats in outer Moscow one
who swims at random to his loss,
and Jewish accents wander down
a dismal yellow flight of stairs.
From love towards unhappiness,
to New Year's Eve, to Sunday, floats
a good-time girl: she can't express
what's lost inside.

Cold evening floats within your eyes
and snow is fluttering on the panes
of carriages; the wind is ice
and pale, it seals your reddened palms.
Evening lights like honey seep;
the scent of halva's everywhere,
as Christmas Eve lifts up its sweet-
meats in the air.

Now drifting on a dark-blue wave
across the city's gloomy sea,
there floating by, your New Year's Eve—
as if life could restart, could be
a thing of light with each day lived
successfully, and food to eat,
—as if, having rolled to left,
it could roll right.

Joseph Brodsky (1962)

—translated from the Russian by Glyn Maxwell

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us not let our racial identities subject us to new tyrannies." The neglect of our plural identities in favor of one "principal" identity can greatly impoverish our lives and our practical reason.

III.

In fact, we can have plural identities even with competing categories. One citizenship does compete, in an elementary sense, with another citizenship, in a person's identity. But as this example itself indicates, even competing identities need not demand that one and one only of the unique specifications may survive, vanquishing all the other alternatives. A person can be a dual citizen, say, of both the United Kingdom and the United States. Of course, citizenship can be made exclusive, as in China or Japan or India or Germany. (This was also the case with the United States until quite recently.) Even when exclusivity is insisted on, however, the conflict of dual loyalty need not disappear. If an Indian citizen resident in Britain is unable to take British citizenship because she does not want to lose her Indian citizenship, she may still have quite a substantial loyalty to her British attachments and to other features of her British identity, which no Indian court can outlaw. Similarly, an erstwhile Indian citizen who has given up that citizenship to become a citizen of the United Kingdom may still retain considerable loyalties to her Indian identity.

The plurality of competing as well as noncompeting identities is not only not contradictory, it can also be part and parcel of the self-conceptions of migrants and their families. Indeed, the tendency of British citizens of West Indian or South Asian origin to cheer their "home" teams in test cricket has sometimes been seen as proof of disloyalty to Britain. This phenomenon has led to Lord Tebbit's famous "cricket test," to wit, that you cannot be accepted as English unless you support England in test matches. This view involves a remarkable denial of consistent pluralities that may be easily involved in a person's self-conception as well as social behavior. Which cricket team to cheer is a completely different issue from the demands of British—or any other—citizenship, and different also from a socially cohesive life in England. Indeed, insofar as Tebbit's "cricket test" induces an exclusionary agenda and imposes an unnecessary and irrelevant demand on immigrants, it makes social integration more difficult to achieve.

It is important to recognize the compatibility of plural identities with the demands of citizenship and of social cohesion, both for a fuller understanding of the nature of identity and for a more effective public policy and social practice. A "Pakistani Brit," for example, can feel deeply proud of—even "patriotic" about—cricket back "home" in Pakistan, and this need not conflict with the demands of British citizenship, nor even with a sense of "Britishness" or "Englishness" in other respects—for example, with being integrated in English social life, and defending the Parliamentary system and the English Common Law, and even perceiving some supernatural loyalty to the British pound against the offending euro.

Similarly, on the other side, criticism is sometimes made of people who take pride in traditional British or English culture, and it has even been suggested that such belief must be seen as proof of their nonacceptance of a multi-ethnic Britain. Why so? Surely there is no conflict whatsoever between fully accepting that the contemporary British population is a multi-ethnic mixture (and being strongly supportive of the liberties and the civil rights of different groups), and maintaining at the same time that English traditional culture is far superior to anything that the immigrants have—or could have—brought. There is overwhelming evidence, in fact, that the vast majority of the British people—of all different colors—do not believe in any cultural comparison as simple as that. Yet there is no reason whatever to assume that such a belief, were it to be entertained, would disqualify the person from being a good citizen of a multi-ethnic Britain. The multi-ethnicity of Britain cannot be an all-engulfing super-identity that must knock out all other identifications—and beliefs—in deference to this one cause.

A related issue has been the subject of a somewhat diverting discussion in the recent *Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-ethnic Britain*, sponsored by the Runnymede Trust. The report, to give credit where it is due, discusses many important matters that genuinely need consideration and attention. It is somewhat unfortunate, therefore, that the report gets distracted into the dead end of a nonissue as to whether "Englishness" or "Britishness" has racial connotations. Britain has not been racially homogeneous in any strict sense for a long time, with waves of invasion and immigration over two millennia or more. But until recently the composition of the population was predominantly "white" (a term

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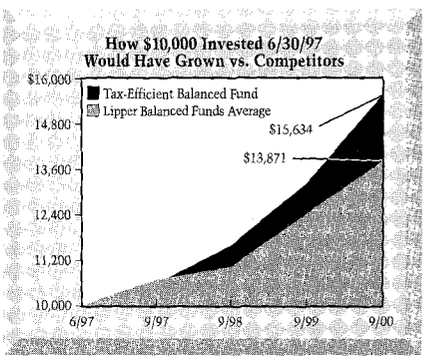

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that has come to be used for a mixed hue with varieties of ruddiness thrown in). This, of course, is a historical fact, as is the cultural fact that Britain is a country whose history has been distinctive, and continues to be influential in the lives of the inhabitants. Even the tradition of political and social tolerance in Britain has strong historical roots.

A historian of language may find it interesting enough to see how the use of the word "British" or even "English" is changing—and changing it certainly is, in all kinds of ways. Indeed, it is worth noting, in fairness to Norman Tebbit, that his absurd "cricket test," misguided as it is, does not demand a skin inspection, only a close scrutiny of the cheers that emanate from immigrants, which is very different from anchoring Britishness or Englishness in racial origins alone. To lament the fact that the terms "British" or "English" were not historically pre-fashioned *ex ante* to take note of the future arrival of multiethnic immigrants would surely be an exercise in futility.

Similarly, on the other side, when J.B.S. Haldane, the great biologist and geneticist, chose to become an Indian citizen and remained so to his death in Calcutta in 1964, he did not demand that the term "Indian" be dissociated from its historical associations. He demanded only that he, too, be counted in as an Indian, which of course he was. I visited the Haldanes a number of times at their home in Baranagar in Calcutta, and I can attest that their living style not only had the mark of their impeccable originality (even eccentricity), but also well-established elements drawn from British culture as well as Indian culture (even though I am not able to tell you which cricket team the Haldanes tended to support). Their acquisition of Indian citizenship was not coupled with a rejection of their British linkages (only of particular features of contemporary British politics); nor, was it accompanied by any qualms about the historical associations of the term "Indian." There is no serious reason for caging oneself in a prison of limited identities, or volunteering to be caught in an imagined contradiction between the richness of the past and the freedom of the present.

Untitled

To E. B.

With riverbanks of frozen chocolate, a city
mixes its reflections in milk. A chiming of bells.
A room with a lampshade. Distantly
clouds burst open like kitchen-doors with busy angels.
I am writing you this from the other side of the earth
on the birthday of Christ. The snow choir
outside the window recite, as if with one mouth,
their mute "ailu-li." Whiteness multiplies the air.
Soon He'll be two thousand. Just fourteen more years.
Today is Wednesday. Tomorrow Thursday. An anniversary
that we have to observe with him without adding ice
or another wrinkle to its cheek, to put it simply.
That is when we will meet. As a star . . . a villager,
through the wall I hear
a piano woken by one finger
like someone learning the alphabet all over
or rather, astronomy, peering into the font
of the constellations for our names where we are not
and where the whole amount
depends on our subtraction into nought.

Joseph Brodsky (1985)

—translated from the Russian by Derek Walcott

IV.

I TURN NOW to the subject of identity choice. Given the alternative identifications among which we can choose, the actual identities to which we can give recognition and priority are, to a considerable extent, ours to determine. This is not to deny that choices—of identity or anything else—are always constrained by feasibility restrictions. But there can be important options, and a genuine freedom, within those restrictions.

The constraints may vary in strength depending on circumstances. There may be especially strong limits to the extent to which we can persuade others to take us to be different from what they take us to be. A Jew in Nazi Germany may not have been able to take on a radically different identity to escape persecution, and the same must have been true of an African American facing a lynch mob. The freedom that we actually have to choose our identity, especially in the way others see us, can often be extremely constrained.

Indeed, sometimes we may not even be fully aware how others identify us, which may differ from self-perception. There is an interesting lesson in an old Italian story—from the 1930s, I believe—concerning a political recruiter from the Fascist Party trying to persuade a rural socialist that he should join the Fascist Party instead. "How can I," said the rural socialist, "join the Fascist Party? My father was a socialist. My grandfather was a socialist. I cannot really join the Fascist Party." "What kind of an argument is *this*?" said the exasperated Fascist recruiter. "What would you have done," he asked, "if your father had been a murderer and your grandfather had also been a murderer? What would you have done then?" "Ah, then," said the rural socialist, "then, of course, I would have joined the Fascist Party."

It may often enough be very hard to change the way others see a person. In general, whether we are considering our identities as we ourselves see them or as others see them, we choose within particular constraints. The choices may be less confined in the case of self-perception, but they can still be quite limited. Yet this is not really a remarkable fact. It is, rather, the most elementary aspect of any choice. Anyone seriously involved in choice theory cannot but be aware that the first exercise to undertake is to identify the constraints within which one chooses. In the economic theory of consumer's choice, for example, the existence of a budget, which of course is a constraint, does not imply that there is no choice to be made, but only that the choice has to be made within one's budget. The point is not whether any identity whatever can be chosen (that would be an absurd claim), but whether we do have choices among alternative identities or combinations of identities—and perhaps more importantly, whether we have substantial freedom on what priority to give to the various identities that we may simultaneously have.

THE REALITY OF identity choice is important in assessing the increasing trend toward cultural separatism that has emerged in recent years with the rise of communitarian reasoning. One of the claims that many communitarians have made is that our identity is a matter of self-realization, and thus not really a matter of choice. As Michael Sandel has explained this claim, "Community describes not just what they have as fellow citizens but also what they are, not a relationship they choose (as in a voluntary

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association) but an attachment they discover, not merely an attribute but a constituent of their identity." In this view, identity comes before reasoning and choice.

This claim—I have argued in "Reason Before Identity," the Romanes Lecture at Oxford in 1998—has to be rejected. There is truth, of course, in the realization that the culture in which one is born and bred can leave a lasting impact on one's perceptions and predispositions; but this does not imply that a person is not able to modify or even to reject antecedent associations. It is not only that we can reconsider the groups with which we would like to identify, but that we can also examine and scrutinize the priorities that we attach to different identities. This does not in any way contradict the elements of discovery in one's identity. We may "discover" our identity in the sense that we may find out that we have a connection or a descent of which we were previously unaware—but to recognize this is not the same as making identity just a matter of discovery, even when the person discovers something very important about herself. Choices have to be made even when discoveries occur. A person may well discover a fact that she did not know—that she is Jewish, or a Parsee, or part-American-Indian by descent; but what importance to attach to this fact is something on which she will have to make her own decisions. People of Jewish origin, for example, can have immensely divergent attitudes to politics, society, religious practice, or indeed to themselves, and the discovery by a person that she is Jewish will not settle any of these issues.

IT IS DIFFICULT to accept that we have no substantial choice between alternative identifications, that we must only "discover" some overarching identity. It is hard to overlook the awareness that we are constantly making such choices. Often the choices are quite explicit, as when Mohandas Gandhi deliberately decided to give priority to his identification with Indians demanding independence from British rule over his identity as a barrister pursuing English legal justice, or when E.M. Forster famously concluded, "If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country." The exercise of such choices may often be implicit and obscure, and also less grandly defended, but it is no less real for that reason. Moreover, the identity choices that we make need not be once-and-for-all and permanent.

To deny choice where choice exists is not only an epistemic mistake; it can also entail a moral and political failure, since it denotes an abdication of one's responsibility to face the fundamental Socratic question: How should I live? Choice is inescapably associated with responsibility, and a chosen identity has to be defended in a way that a discovered identity need not be defended. Indeed, this lack of responsibility can be the cause of a great many transgressions, even a great many horrors.

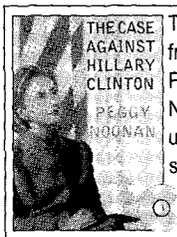
In his new book, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, Jonathan Glover discusses why many atrocities in the world occur as a result of people feeling compelled to act in particular ways, in line with their perceived identities, including chastising others who belong to a group that has a hostile relation with the group with which the person himself identifies. Indeed, many of us from the subcontinent who are old enough to have lived through the bloody 1940s can vividly remember how readily the pre-partition riots drew on the newly devised identity contrasts, which transformed old friends into new enemies and made murderers into putative compatriots. The carnage that followed had much to do with the alleged "discovery" of one's "true" identity, unhampered by a reasoned humanity. Similar butchery—in some cases even more extreme—has been occurring more recently across the world in Rwanda, Congo, Bosnia, Kosovo, and elsewhere, under the spell of newly rediscovered and magnified identities.

V.

IDENTITY CHOICE IS a crucial aspect of many other issues of social ethics. It has a strong bearing, for example, on global justice. Recognizing the possibility of identity choice has the immediate implication that global justice must be distinguished from international justice, with which it is often confounded. To see global justice as international justice is to assume that the national identity of a person is the only—or at least the dominant—identity. But people in different parts of the world interact with each other in many different ways—through commerce, through literature, through political agitations, through global NGOs, through the news media, through the Internet, and so on. Their relations are not all mediated through governments or representatives of nations. A feminist activist in Britain who wants to help to remedy some features of women's disadvantage in Africa or Asia, draws on a sense of identity that does not work through the sympathies of one nation for the predicament of another. Her identity as a fellow woman may be more important here than her citizenship.

Similarly, many NGOs—Médecins sans Frontières, OXFAM, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and others—explicitly focus on affiliations and associations that cut across national boundaries. And even commercial linkages and market relations can establish human connections. As long ago as the 1770s, David Hume noted the importance of increased intercourse in expanding the reach of our sense of justice:

> Again suppose that several distinct societies maintain a kind of intercourse for mutual convenience and advantage, the boundaries of justice still grow larger, in proportion to the largeness of men's views, and the force of their mutual connexions. History, experience, reason sufficiently instruct us in this natural progress of human sentiments, and in the gradual enlargement of our regards to justice, in proportion as we become acquainted with the extensive utility of that virtue.



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Global justice cannot but embrace identities that go well beyond citizenship.

This topic, which has always had strong ethical interest, has become especially prominent in recent years, partly as a result of protests and demonstrations from Seattle and Washington to London and Prague. One of the first features to note about the recent demonstrations against globalization is the extent to which these protests were themselves globalized events—drawing on people from very many different countries and distinct regions in the world. The legitimate concerns of the demonstrators have often been expressed in roughly structured demands and crudely devised slogans, and the themes of these protests have been consistently more important than their theses. But in the present context it is important to observe that the sense of identity that finds expression in these movements—and also in many other expressions of global concern—goes well beyond national identities. The world is not just a collection of nations, it is also a collection of persons; and international justice cannot exhaust the claims of global justice.

VI.

I RETURN NOW to the multi-ethnicity of contemporary Britain. I discussed earlier why it is important to take fuller note of "plural identity" and I want now to comment on the importance of "identity choice" in this exercise. Just as the global world cannot be seen only as a collection of nations, similarly a multi-ethnic British nation cannot be seen as a collection of ethnic communities. This differs somewhat from the vision that has been outlined in the *Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-ethnic Britain*. As its chairman, Lord Parekh (a distinguished political theorist and the author of *Rethinking Multiculturalism*), explains, we should think of Britain as "a looser federation of cultures held together by common bonds of interest and affection and a collective sense of being."

This is a well-articulated position, and Parekh ably presents the reasoning behind this conclusion. And yet I must argue that a person's relation to Britain need not be mediated through the "culture" of the family in which he or she may have been born. A person may decide to seek identity with more than one of these predefined cultures or—just as plausibly—with none of them. Also, a person may well decide that her ethnic or cultural identity is less important to her than, say, her political convictions, or her professional commitments, or her literary persuasions. It is a choice for her to make, no matter how she is placed in an imagined "federation of cultures."

These are not abstract concerns, nor are they specific features of the complexity of modern life. Consider the case of Cornelia Sorabji, who came to Britain in 1880s. She was variously described by herself and by others as an "Indian" (she did return to India and wrote an engaging book called *India Calling*); as being at home in England as well ("homed in two countries, England and India"); as a Parsee ("I am Parsee by nationality"); as a Christian (full of admiration for "the Early Martyrs of the Christian Church"); as a sari-clad woman ("always perfectly dressed in a richly coloured silk sari," the *Manchester Guardian* described her); as a lawyer and a barrister-at-law (at Lincoln's Inn); as a fighter for women's education and for legal rights, particularly for secluded women (she specialized as a legal advisor to "purdahnaschins"); as a committed supporter of the British Raj (she even accused Mahatma Gandhi, not particularly fairly, of enrolling "babies as early as six and seven years of age"); as always nostalgic about India ("the green paroquets at Budh Gaya: the blue wood-smoke in an Indian village"); as a firm believer in the asymmetry between women and men, despite her self-conscious modernity (she was proud to be seen as "a modern woman"); as a teacher at an exclusively men's college ("at eighteen, in a Male College"); and as "the first woman" of any race to get the degree of Bachelor of Civil Law at Oxford (requiring "a special decree from Congregation to allow her to sit"). Cornelia Sorabji chose her plural identities under the influence of her background, but through her own decisions and priorities. In making her own choices she was not unique, despite the spectacular uniqueness of her chosen combination of identities.

In addition to acknowledging the importance of individual freedom in making one's own choices, it is also important to take note of the fact that the so-called "cultures" do not reflect anything like some monolithic and uniquely defined set of attitudes and beliefs. Indian traditions, for example, are often taken to be intimately associated with religion—and yet Sanskrit and Pali have a larger literature in defense of atheism and agnosticism than can be found in any other classical language, Greek or Roman or Hebrew or Arabic. Consider, for instance, this assertive anti-religious view:

> There is no after-world, nor any religious practice for attaining that. Follow what is within your experience and do not trouble yourself with what lies beyond the province of human experience.

Or consider this more aggressive and combative view:

> The injunctions about worship of Gods, sacrifice, gifts and penance have been laid down in the Shastras [Hindu scriptures] *by clever people, just to rule over* [other] people and to make them submissive and disposed to charity.

These views might be seen as quite unacceptable if expressed by some indigenous—or "native"—British critic, who could get into trouble in the newly conceived "federation of cultures." Yet they are direct quotations from the *Ramayana*, and reflect points of view that found room for expression in that two-millennia-old Indian epic, which is sometimes taken (wrongly, as it happens) as a definitive sourcebook of orthodox Hinduism. Indeed, similar diversities of view can be found in many other old Indian texts, including the *Mahabharata* (the sister-epic of the *Ramayana*) and several other ancient documents that combine assertions of belief with expressions of disbelief. There is also an elaborate exposition of anti-religious skepticism in the writings of the "Lokayata" and the "Charvaka" schools (which date from around the sixth century B.C.), some of which are respectfully included in authoritative compilations such as the classic *Sarvadarshana-samgraha*, or *The Collection of All Philosophies*, written by Madhava Acharya in the fourteenth century.

Indeed, many of the "cultures" that are frequently interpreted in rigidly narrow terms by contemporary religious leaders contain enormous internal variations of attitudes and beliefs. One of the dangers associated with the program of creating a "federation of cultures" is to submerge the internal diversity of a culture in a falsely uniform view of it, and to deny the freedom of members of the community to take their own view and to arrive at their own interpretations of the contents of their cultures. Indeed, these cultures have often taken much broader and more tolerant views than the officially recognized religious leaders allow today. Muslim emperors in Turkey, or the Moghal rulers (such as Akbar) in India, were often much more liberal on religious matters than their European contemporaries. When, in the twelfth century, the great Jewish philosopher and jurist Maimonides had to flee an intolerant Europe (where he was born) and its persecution of Jews, he chose the security of tolerant and urbane Cairo and the patronage of Sultan Saladin. Similarly, it is important to remember, in the light of recent attempts by some Hindu political leaders to target Christian advocacy in India, that India already had large Christ-

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ian communities as early as the fourth century—at least two hundred years before Britain had any Christians at all.

If the school curriculum in Britain is to include more history of other cultures, which is not at all a frivolous demand, it is very important to make sure that the guardianship of what to include and what to leave out is not placed in the hands only of officially recognized leaders of these communities and cultures. This, of course, is not a part of Lord Parekh's program, and he himself is too wise and too well informed to go that way; but the view of Britain as a "federation of cultures" does arouse the deepest suspicions about how the cultures would be represented in this newly conceived federation. The alternative unitary but freedom-centered conception of Britain as a society of persons, with various backgrounds, who are free to choose their own identities and priorities, has merits that the "federation" view does not have. It is bad enough to have what Appiah has called the "new tyrannies" of identity. To have them with official patronage would be altogether tragic.

VII.

I COME, FINALLY, to the last of the three particular questions concerning identity, namely the transcendence of it, or what I called "beyond identity." Even after due recognition is given to "plural identity" and "identity choice," we still have to consider the claims of other people who do not share our own identities. This is, of course, a very big subject, and I can only touch on a few of its elementary aspects.

Perhaps the first point to note is that universalist demands do not necessarily take the form of identifying with all people, but rather that of considering the interests and the claims of all people whether or not one identifies with them. Indeed, the basis of our concern for others need not be confined only to identifying oneself with others. Moral or political inclusion is not the same thing as identity. There is an inescapable crudity in thinking that we cannot sympathize with the joys and the miseries, the predicaments and the achievements, of others without actually seeing them as some kind of an extension of ourselves. Taking sympathy to be an extended form of self-seeking through the device of seeing others as ourselves may have a nobility of its own, but it is surely possible to entertain sympathy without actually inserting one's own self into the lives of others.

In dealing with Kantian arguments, to which I made reference earlier, or with the reasoning to be found in Adam Smith's demand for invoking the "impartial spectator," it is essential to have impartiality as well as universal coverage. In sympathizing with others, there are two quite different uses of identity: an "epistemic" use, in trying to know what others feel and what they see by placing oneself in the position of others, and an "ethical" use, in counting them as if they were the same as oneself. The epistemic use of identity is inescapably important, since our knowledge of other people's minds has to be derivative, in one way or another, on our placing ourselves in the position of others. But the ethical use of identity may be far from obligatory. To respond to the interests of others, we can see ourselves as "impartial spectators," as Smith described the role; but this demand of impartial concern is not the same thing as promoting the interests of others on the ground that they are, in some sense, extensions of oneself. As people capable of abstraction and reasoning, we should be able to respond humanely to the predicaments of others who are different and are seen to be different. Identity-based reasoning may have its place in moral and political thinking, but it cannot exhaust the entire domain of reasoned ethics.

Similarly, political inclusion can be very important for political justice, whether or not any great identity issue is invoked in that inclusion. *The Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* notes that in many ways Britain has been more successful than some of its European neighbors—Germany and even France—in keeping intense racism and anti-immigrant agitation at bay. In explaining the difference, it is quite important to look at differences in political inclusion that the respective voting laws have allowed. In Germany, a legally settled immigrant does not have the political right to vote because of the difficulties and the delays in acquiring citizenship (though there have been recent efforts to change this). Britain avoided this problem not only through less impenetrable citizenship laws but also (indeed, mainly) through a historical connection. Thanks to the imperial tradition, taken over by the Commonwealth, the right to vote is determined in the United Kingdom not exclusively by British citizenship, but also by the citizenship of the Commonwealth. Indeed, any citizen of the Commonwealth—any subject of the Queen as the head of the Commonwealth—immediately acquires voting rights in Britain on being accepted for settlement. Since most of the nonwhite immigrants to Britain came from Commonwealth countries (from Jamaica and Trinidad; Nigeria and Ghana, Uganda and Kenya; India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh), they have had the

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right of political participation in Britain immediately on arrival on a permanent basis. This does not, of course, give them the right to immigrate, but once settled in Britain, political inclusion comes immediately and effectively.

If a right-wing extremist in Germany makes strongly anti-immigrant statements, he does not lose the votes of immigrants (since they have none), whereas he can gain votes of those who are inclined in the same anti-immigrant direction. In Britain, by contrast, anti-immigrant statements may please some, but they also immediately bring a backlash from immigrant voters, even when they have not yet acquired British citizenship. This has made the British political parties quite keen on wooing the immigrant vote, and this clearly has served as a brake on the earlier attempts at racist politics in Britain. There is certainly no reason for complacency in Britain, which still has many problems; but there is reason for some satisfaction here.

More importantly, there is the need to acknowledge the significance of political inclusion, which has consequences and achievements of its own that need not be confused with any notion of social identity. It is essential to recognize not only that identities can be plural, and that the priorities that we assign to our different identities are a matter for us to decide, but also that moral and political inclusion transcends the domain of identity. These issues are not only of interest for our social understanding; they are also very pertinent to some of the most difficult practical problems in the contemporary world. There is need for clarity on all this. ■

Ariel's Appetite

By ZOË HELLER

The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath edited by Karen V. Kukil

(Anchor Books, 732 pp., $18)

> Saturday exhausted, nerves frayed. Sleepless. Threw you, book, down, punched with fist. Kicked, punched. Violence seethed. Joy to murder someone, pure scapegoat. But pacified during necessity to work... Baked a lemon meringue pie, cooled lemon custard and crust on cold bathroom windowsill, stirring in black night and stars. Set table, candles, glasses sparkling crystal barred crystal on yellow woven cloth ... Shaping a meal, people, I grew back to joy.

ONE OF THE less expected motifs of Sylvia Plath's journals is her intense and abiding appreciation of food. The journals are frequently casual, even scribbly, in style. But on those occasions when Plath bothers to summon up a little technique, it is remarkable how often it is food—as comforter, as redeemer—that prompts the effort. The rain will be falling, Ted's greasy hair and ragged nails will be getting on her nerves, Mommy and Daddy will be banging away on the cellar door, and, lo, along will come "fat lucent bacon on cracked wheat toast," or "good corn-thickened soup and tuna salad lush with mayonnaise," or "slick rubbery white crescents" of hardboiled egg "cradling the brilliant yellow powdery yolk," or the "scraggly-lace, blue-eyed peacock shells" of raw oysters, to make the world temporarily right again.

We have had intimations of this delight in mealtimes from other sources. Plath's appetite seems to have excited a certain irritated amazement among her female acquaintance. In her infamously bitchy essay "Vessel of Wrath," Dido Merwin, a passionate Tedista, describes Plath on holiday in France, wolfing down foie gras "as though it were 'Aunt Dot's meat loaf'" and eating a large dinner with gusto despite having packed away a "Pantagruelian triple lunch." Anne Stevenson, in whose biography Merwin's account appears, notes that Plath's appetite remained robust, even in her grim final days. "At dinner, Jillian was surprised to see Sylvia eat her steak with enormous relish... However distraught she was at other times, she always appeared dressed for meals, ate extremely well and was warmly appreciative of the food Jillian served." The condemned woman ate a hearty meal.

There is something comic about the pursed-lipped "surprise" elicited by the doomed poet's unseemly interest in steak. For these observers, Plath's pleasure in food is a symptom of her selfishness and her rapacity—an "acting out" of the Lady Lazarus persona who ate men like air. But Plath herself seems to have understood it as quite the opposite: a reprieve from, rather than an extension of, her broiling inner drama. In the strange, private symbolism of the journals, preparing and eating food, along with various other banal rituals of domestic life, represent rare and valuable moments of escape from herself—brief connections with a material reality outside her fevered head. "I long to permeate the matter of this world," she writes at the age of twenty-three, "to become anchored to life by laundry and lilacs, daily bread and fried eggs and a man, the dark-eyed stranger who eats my food and my body and my love and goes around the world all day and comes back to find solace with me at night." Three years later she is reminding herself, "How dusting, washing daily dishes, talking to people who are not mad and dust and wash and feel life is as it should be, helps.... I need a flow of life on the outside, a child, a job, a community I know from preacher to baker. Not this drift of fairytales."

THOSE INTERESTED IN understanding Plath as an archetype of oppressed female creativity have tended to pass over her paeans to fried eggs and dusting, or to dismiss them as "not the real Sylvia"—the last, florid vestiges of a fake, *Ladies Home Journal* Sylvia that had to fall away before she could realize her authentic self. The significant lines for this audience are the ones that Plath wrote to a woman friend when she and Hughes had parted, and she was experiencing the great writing jag that produced the *Ariel* poems: "Psychologically, Ruth, I am fascinated by the polarities of muse-poet and mother housewife. When I was 'happy' domestically I felt a gag in my throat. Now that my domestic life.... is chaos, I am ... producing free stuff I had locked in me for years."

But the victorious feminist parable that Plath is attempting here to extract from her situation (the "anchor" of domesticity turns out to be a shackle, after all) has to be measured against the fact of her imminent suicide. Just a few months after writing this letter, the liberated artist would put her head in a gas oven. The relative calm of married life may indeed have blocked or gagged Plath's poetic gift; but, as she repeatedly attests in the journals, it also helped to keep her alive.

ZOË HELLER's novel *Everything You Know* will be published in paperback by Pocket Books in February.

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In an entry in her journal in 1959, made while she and Hughes were staying at the writer's colony at Yaddo, Plath alludes to "a great, stark, bloody play acting itself out over and over again behind the sunny facade of our daily rituals, birth, marriage, death, behind parents and schools and beds and tables of food: the dark, cruel, murderous shades, the demon-animals, the Hungers." This is an epiphany of sorts—a summation of her true poetic subject; but it is also a tacit acknowledgment of the deadly threat that the subject poses. In the end, the journals do not depict a put-upon housewife struggling to free herself from the yoke of her husband or from the burden of "false consciousness." The woman who emerges in these pages is someone who recognizes the perilous interconnectedness of her creative and suicidal drives, and shrewdly pursues conventional domestic happiness—or "sunny facades"—as a means of tethering herself to sanity.

Plath seems to have understood the need to evade her demon-animals at a very young age. In her earliest journal entries, written as an undergraduate at Smith, the accounts of 1950s college life—dates and dances, tense necking sessions in cars, and so on—are interspersed with fretful rebukes to her own fatal inwardness. "It seems to me more than ever that I am a victim of introspection. If I have not the power to put myself in the place of other people, I shall never be the magnanimous, creative person I wish to be." (The reader feels some sympathy for Plath's dates, those callow young Yale men smooching with her on doorsteps, oblivious of the elaborate mental machinery whirring away beneath her demure coed exterior.) Significantly, the first stirrings of concern about her self-absorption coincide with her identification of prose fiction as the artistic holy grail. Poems are all very well, she tells herself, but it is stories—stories about "other people"—that represent the apex of writerly achievement. In the course of the journals, the peculiar urgency of Plath's desire to "conquer" fiction becomes a kind of metaphor for the life-and-death fight against solipsism.

It is a heroic fight. Plath was a fanatical self-improver, who filled her journals with stern injunctions to do better, get up earlier, study harder, "work on her femininity," learn German, French, horseback riding, and put more philosophy into her poems so as not to "lag behind Adrienne Rich." She seemed to believe that she could also flay herself into acquiring empathy. Every year she churns and churns away at her stories, willing herself, unsuccessfully, to believe in subjectivities other than her own.

She pores over other people's fiction for tips, wonders hopefully whether having children will "humanize" her. In 1959, when she gets a part-time job typing patient records at a psychiatric clinic in Boston, she is briefly optimistic that exposure to all those case histories will "deepen and enrich" her understanding of people. But still the stories do not come, or if they come they turn out "mad, self-centered." In 1961, Plath wrings a novel out of herself, but that doesn't count. *The Bell Jar* is just "a potboiler" after all, and besides it is all about her. "Always myself, myself," she laments.

It has been suggested, most notably by Janet Malcolm, that Plath, had she lived, would have gone on to become a fine novelist. But the journals are not a good advertisement for that theory. They tend, on the contrary, to support Plath's own suspicion that she is "at bottom uninterested in people." Even allowing for the egotism inherent in the form, the authorial spirit that presides over these pages is preternaturally void of *caritas*. We read Plath in 1958, wishing languidly for a nasty accident or incident to pique her imagination —"a child crushed by a car, a house on fire, someone thrown into a tree by a horse"— and we think: all right, a little flint is a necessary component of the writer's heart. But in 1962 she gets her wish—a real dying man in the house right next to hers in Devon!—and the chill disgust of her ensuing observations leads us to wonder whether flint is all there is. "His eyes showed through partly open lids like dissolved soaps or a clotted pus. I was very sick at this and had a bad migraine over my left eye for the rest of the day. The end, of even so marginal a man, a horror."

Sylvia Plath by Jack Coughlin for The New Republic

Here is what Plath calls her "ice-eye"—the merciless scalpel-vision, that feeds on the grotesque and "will kill ... anyone who is weak, false, sickly in soul." One of the chief boasts of this unabridged edition of the journals—a transcription of twenty-three manuscripts that begin in 1950, just before Plath leaves home for Smith College and end in July 1962, a year before she kills herself at the age of thirty—is to have restored all the ice-eye passages—"the nasty bits"—that Frances McCullough, the editor of the original 1982 edition, chose to excise. Now we can enjoy the full extent of Plath's vituperative gift. Here, for the first time, are the luridly matricidal meditations inspired by Plath's therapy sessions with the psychiatrist Ruth Buescher in the late 1950s:

> So how do I express my hatred for my mother? In my deepest emotions I think of her as an enemy: someboday who "killed" my father, my first male ally in the world. She is a murderess of maleness. What to do with her, with the hostility, undying, which I feel for her? I want, as ever, to grab my life out from under her hot itchy hands.... She's a killer. Watch Out. She's deadly as a cobra under that shiny greengold hood.... I'll have my own husband, thank you. You won't kill him the way you killed my father. He has a soul, he has sex strong as it comes. He isn't going to die so soon. So keep out.

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Your breath stinks worse than Undertaker's Basement when it comes to trying to rear a soul in its perfect freedom.

Here, too, are a host of more fleeting, but hardly less hostile, dissections of friends, neighbors and colleagues. Despite her avowed interest in souls, it is physical imperfection rather than spiritual imperfection that tends to inspire Plath's finest flights: the hair of her friend Paul Roche, "like pampered and crimped wheat"; the "queerly warted" face of the fat invalid who lives downstairs from her in Boston and smells of "old lady sweat"; the pale hands of one of the women professors at Smith, "like air-borne, white bellied flounder backs, freckled, gesturing, stub nails enameled with gilt paint." (My personal favorite in this group appears in an entry for 1953, in which Plath dismisses one of her suitors on the grounds that he is too short and thin and that sex with him would be like "being raped by a humming, entranced insect.")

"She has the rarity of being, in her work at least, never 'a nice person' " Elizabeth Hardwick has written of Plath. Yet that deficit of niceness was clearly not for want of trying. Plath strove—quite desperately—to become nice, to be the sort of person who felt other people's pain. Compared to the vivid stuff in her own dream-bank, however, the suffering that went on elsewhere was always hopelessly abstract. She couldn't get a purchase on it. There is a wonderful moment in one of her stentorian To Do list entries for 1959, when she orders herself to "Write another NYorker story" and to "Look up German concentration, I mean American detention camps." Tomato, tomahto, as it were.

She got the hang of the difference in the end, of course: German concentration camps gave her the imagery of her most famous poems. Much has been written about the dubious ethics of conjoining the abominations of the Nazis with the perceived malevolence of a dead father—of using the camps as a metaphor for mental pain. In forging these connections, Plath was coming as close to sympathy as the grimly centripetal force of her imagination would let her. It was a part of her tragedy as a woman and a poet that even when confronted with the Holocaust, all her ice-eye could seize upon was an objective correlative for her own condition.

Presepio

The wise men; Joseph; the tiny Infant; Mary;
the cows; the drovers, each with his dromedary;
the hulking shepherds in their sheepskins—they
have all become toy figures made of clay.

In the cotton-batting snow that's strewn with glints,
a fire is blazing. You'd like to touch that tinsel
star with a finger—or all five of them,
as the Infant wished to do in Bethlehem.

All this, in Bethlehem, was of greater size.
Yet the clay, round which the drifted cotton lies,
with tinsel overhead, feels good to be
enacting what we can no longer see.

Now you are huge compared to them, and high
beyond their ken. Like a midnight passerby
who finds the pane of some small hut aglow,
you peer from the cosmos at this little show.

There life goes on, although the centuries
require that some diminish by degrees,
while others grow, like you. The small folk there
contend with granular snow and icy air,

and the smallest reaches for the breast, and you
half wish to clench your eyes, or step into
a different galaxy, in whose wastes there shine
more lights than there are sands in Palestine.

Joseph Brodsky (1991)

—translated from the Russian by Richard Wilbur

WHY DO WE read the journals? Almost every aspect of Plath's posthumous publishing history has given rise to some manner of controversy, but the value of the journals —the worthiness of Ted Hughes's decision to make them public—has never been contested. The only objections have been to their incompleteness (two volumes covering Plath's last three years were, respectively, burned and "lost" by Hughes after her death) and to the bowdlerized form in which they originally appeared.

Nobody, so far as I know, argues for the importance of the journals on grounds of their inherent literary merit. Notwithstanding the odd zingy sentence and lushly depressive passage, they do not achieve, or indeed aspire, to the status of, say, Keats's letters or Virginia Woolf's diaries. And nobody is quite prepared to say that they are useful for what gossipy details they furnish for a famous literary "case."

Officially, it seems, Plath's journals are valued for what they tell us about the poetry and the processes that brought it into being. In his foreword to the first edition of the journals, Ted Hughes argued that they provided an unusually lucid diagram of Plath's "root system"—a diagram that would be helpful in clearing up "certain evident confusions" provoked by Plath's later poems. "'Ariel' is dramatic speech of a kind," he wrote. "But to what persona and to what drama is it to be fitted? The poems don't seem to supply enough evidence of the definitive sort."

Don't they? It would seem a rather damning indictment of a poem to say that it is strictly incomprehensible unless it is read in tandem with the poet's diaries. "Ariel" is full of allusions to a private and not perfectly explained mythology of grief and travail; but surely its poetic effects are not dependent on extra biographical information. If they are, can they really be said to be poetic effects?

Hughes seemed to recognize the problem here. He went on to note that the enigmatic quality of the poems "might have been no bad thing, if a riddle fertile in hypotheses is a good one." But the circumstances of Plath's death, he explained, along with various "errant" versions of her biography and the publication of *Letters Home* (a selection of the cheery, slightly twee letters that Plath wrote to her mother between *1950 to 1963*) had given rise to hypotheses that were wrong. So while the journals were not necessary for intrinsically literary reasons, they had become necessary, as a means of combating, or silencing, faulty readings.

Given how ungenerous and even slanderous many of those readings were in regard to Hughes himself, one can hardly blame him for wishing to defend his own interpretation of "Ariel"—his own interpretation of Plath—by whatever means available. But there was something a little naïve, or perhaps just old-fashioned, about Hughes's belief that any text—even a text written by the author herself—would provide an ultimate answer, an

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interpretive authority. Needless to say, the journals have not quashed speculation and debate about the meanings of the poems, or the meanings of Plath's life. They have simply given the speculation a large chunk of new matter to gnaw on.

And in doing so, one cannot help feeling, they have helped to thicken the obfuscating cult around the writer. From the moment that Plath committed suicide, the notion of reading the poems "innocently" became an impossibility. Her death is the prism through which her work is doomed to be regarded. But the journals, precisely because they are the writer's own words—precisely because they promise to tell us "what she was really like"—can only aggravate the problem. Hughes was not wrong about the wealth of "evidence" that they provide. They adumbrate Plath's poetic themes—the filial loathing, the "deaths" and "resurrections," the warring selves—and identify the biographical provenance of these themes with a fastidious, even sinister clarity, almost as if Plath had been intentionally composing a Cliffs Notes for her future readers. But the critical interest that such diagrams tend to arouse is all in the wrong direction. It is an interest that transforms the poems into little more than glorified clues—verse conduits to the tragic "real life." Or worse, religious souvenirs of whatever feminist or sentimental moral that the life is deemed to represent.

Ted Hughes once complained, in a letter to Anne Stevenson, that what motivated most of the scholarly interest in Plath was mere curiosity—"curiosity of quite a low order, the ordinary village kind, the bloodsport kind." This is the sort of righteous sentiment that elicits automatic head-nodding. Still, it is interesting to keep Hughes's indignant phrase in mind when making one's way through this volume. Perhaps high-minded literary scholarship is never quite as distinct from the low, bloodsport kind as Hughes seemed to think it was. But if there is such a thing as a pure literary interest, devoid of base, village inquisitiveness, Plath's journals are surely not the document one would hope to inspire it. ■

Through a Glass Vaguely

By JOHN BANVILLE

All the Names
by José Saramago
translated by Margaret Jull Costa

(Harcourt, 256 pp., $24)

WHEN I WAS but a lad, and had not yet learned to beware the *faux amis* lying plausibly in wait for me in the playground of the French language, I imagined that the term *la nouvelle vague*, then much in vogue, meant not "the new wave" but something like "the new vagueness." *La nouvelle vague* was a journalistic appellation for the new young *cinéastes*, Truffaut, Resnais, Godard, and the rest, but in my mind, presumably because of the faux-homophony between *nouvelle* and novel, it became applied also to practitioners of the *nouveau roman* such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, Philippe Sollers, and Nathalie Sarraute, those bright but distant stars in my slowly expanding literary firmament. "The new vagueness" seemed to me to describe very well the work of these writers, with its willfully jaded dynamics, its studied aversion to specifics, its degree-zero style.

I came to have an image of the quintessential post-modern (though the word was still only a gleam in the eye of Jacques Derrida *et ses amis*) European novel. There would be a faceless anti-hero, trudging the great avenues and the squalid back alleys of a nameless city, following some mysteriously ordained quest which he knows he can neither complete nor abandon, and which is, anyway, merely a metaphor for the real task in which he is engaged, namely, the search for an Identity. Even the pages of this ur-*roman* would have a characteristic look to them: high and narrow and somehow tottery, with squeezed margins, few paragraph breaks, and no passages of dialogue where in more conventional tales the weary reader could pause to paddle in the shallows.

All very earnest, all very enigmatic, and all maddeningly *vague*. And this kind of novel is still being written in mainland Europe. Every year it wins one of those little-known but highly lucrative literary prizes offered by this or that unpronounceable foundation with affiliations to the European Union. Some of these novels even deserve a prize. Some of them are even read, or at least bought, by surprisingly large numbers of people. But it is all a far, far cry from the glory days of the European novel, when a new work by Thomas Mann or Alberto Moravia or Günter Grass would set the Sunday supplements humming with excitement.

Fiction in Europe is now generally an etiolated, unassuming, apologetic affair, a tired voice out of what seem exhausted cisterns. Opening José Saramago's *All the Names*, with its severe, oddly punctuated pages, each one tall and almost as black as the monolith in *2001*, one might be forgiven an involuntary small sigh of foreboding, like those sighs with which, in another age, we used to greet some poetaster's latest slim volume of verse. Despite the many graces of *All the Names*, such a first response to it would be not entirely unjustified.

SARAMAGO WAS BORN in Portugal in 1922, in what one of his English publishers calls "a small farming community north of the Alentejo," and when still a boy he moved with his family to Lisbon. He left school early, and worked as a mechanic, a draughtsman, a civil servant, and in publishing. When he was twenty-five he published a novel, presumably without success, and his literary career did not begin in earnest until he was in his middle forties. He produced three volumes of poetry, he was a journalist and translator, and then he published his second novel, the wonderfully titled *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* (one gleefully imagines the confusion in bookshops, not to mention library catalogues). In 1988, his novel *Baltasar and Blimunda* appeared in English, and the following year he had a modest success in the English-speaking world with what is perhaps his best-known, if not his best, novel, *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*. Other works have followed, including *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, and the extraordinary *Blindness*. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1998.

The finest of these books are *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* and *Blind-*

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ness. The former is a sort of Portuguese *Ulysses*, and it can probably only be fully appreciated, as Saramago himself has suggested, by readers who are themselves Portuguese, calling as it does for a considerable knowledge of Portugal's history as a great empire and later as a dictatorship under Salazar. Ricardo Reis was one of the very many pen-names, or better say, one of the very many identities assumed by the elusive Portuguese poet and aphorist Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935), and much of the novel is a recounting of meetings and conversations in Lisbon in the 1930s between Reis and his creator, who, when the narrative opens, has recently died.

Yes, it is that kind of book. Still, Saramago here avoids the self-consciousness and the risible portentousness of so much fantastical fiction that has emerged in recent years from the "Latin" countries, from South America and, especially, from the Indian subcontinent. *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* bubbles with underground laughter, and despite the absurdity of its central premise—a deceased writer conversing at length with an invented version of himself—which would have been unbearably whimsical in the hands of a lesser writer, it keeps its feet firmly set on that mundane ground where the novel is at its strongest: "Ricardo Reis goes to lunch, on this occasion to the Chave de Ouro, for a steak ... and with so many hours to go before nightfall he buys a ticket for a movie, he will see *The Volga Boatmen*, a French film with Pierre Blanchard, what Volga can they possibly have invented in France."

SARAMAGO HAS A light, graceful, ironical touch, and he maintains a welcome restraint in his use of the paraphernalia of magical realism, that literary dead-end into which so many talented writers have stumbled over the past two or three decades, chasing like lemmings after the ghosts of the colorful Buendia clan. Saramago is well-aware that, contrary to popular notions, one of the novelist's primary duties is to keep his imagination under tight control. In fantastic fictions, what is presented as exuberance is often merely unruliness. For the rule of magical realism is that there are no rules. When you can say anything, however, the danger is that you will do exactly that: say anything. The inventor of magical realism did produce a masterpiece, but the judicious critic might say of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* what T. S. Eliot said of *Finnegans Wake*, that one book like this is enough.

The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis is moving, and wise, and in places slyly funny. But there is not much fun to be had in *Blindness*, a dystopian account of what happens when everyone in the world suddenly goes blind, with the exception of one woman, the wife, suitably enough, of an ophthalmologist. In a chilling twist, what the epidemic of blindness brings to its victims is not darkness, but a blank white glare. There is an awful inevitability to the descent into anarchy and internecine warfare that the book traces (it was Eliot, again, who foresaw such warfare as the future of mankind, "people fighting each other in the streets"), but Saramago resists the temptation to indulge in Burroughsesque grotesqueries. Here are perfectly ordinary people struggling to cope with total catastrophe—or, at the other end of the human scale, seizing the opportunity to indulge their basest urgings.

The section of the novel in which a gang of thugs forces a group of women to submit to sexual degradation in return for food is truly horrifying, not least because it is so calmly described. It is possible, reading such passages, to believe that posterity may well set *Blindness* on the same lofty shelf as the works of Swift and Céline. All the same, at the end a little light does dawn, when people's eyesight returns as suddenly as it vanished, although what they have to look on is a world in ruins.

At the end of *Blindness*, the woman who all along could see encounters a blind writer who has continued at his craft despite not being able to read what he is writing.

> The doctor's wife asked, "May I?" Without waiting for a reply she picked up the written pages, there must have been about twenty, she passed her eye over the tiny handwriting, over the lines which went up and down, over the words inscribed on the whiteness of the page, recorded in blindness, I am only passing through, the writer had said, and these were the signs he had left in passing.

Something of the same obsessiveness and dogged refusal to abandon a dubious enterprise is displayed, alas, by the protagonist (if that is the word) of Saramago's latest novel, *All the Names*.

THIS IS THE story (if *that* is the word) of a lowly clerk working in the Central Registry of Births, Marriages, and Deaths who embarks on a search to locate a woman whose birth certificate finds its way by accident into "his extensive collection of news items about people in his country who, for good reasons and bad, had becomes famous." The clerk's name is Senhor José; we are assured that he also has surnames, "very ordinary ones, nothing extravagant," but everyone, including his creator, knows him simply as Senhor José. In fact, he is the only character in the novel who, despite the book's title, is given any kind of name, all the others being identified simply by what they are or what they do. One supposes this is meant to Mean Something. Are we back to the quest for identity?

Senhor José lives in a small, shabby house attached to one of the massive walls of the Central Registry, to which he has direct access through his back door. In the Registry there is a strict hierarchy of command: at the bottom are Senhor José and his fellow drudges, at the top is the remote and olympian Registrar, "who knows all there is to know about the kingdoms of the visible and the invisible." It is under

Untitled

To Elisabeth Leonskaja

The air-fierce frost and pine-boughs.
We'll cram ourselves in thick clothes,
stumbling in drifts till we're weary—
better a reindeer than a dromedary.

In the North where faith does not fail
God appears as the warden of a jail
where the kicks in our ribs were rough
but what you hear is 'They didn't get enough.'

In the South the white stuff's a rare sight,
they love Christ who was also in flight,
desert-born, sand and straw his welcome,
he died, so they say, far from home.

So today, commemorate with wine and bread,
a life with just the sky's roof overhead
because up there a man escapes
the arresting earth—plus there's more space.

Joseph Brodsky (1994)

—translated from the Russian by Derek Walcott

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the withering and all-seeing eye of this potentate that Senhor José goes in search of the "unknown woman." He identifies the school where she was a pupil, and breaks into it at night in search of her records—this is a mournfully funny episode—and from there goes on to discover where she lived, learns that she married, and was divorced, and was a teacher at her old school, and at last, at a genuinely startling juncture in the narrative, that she is dead, and by her own hand. Even this fact, however, does not deter Senhor José, this hapless Orpheus who will follow his unknown Euridice even into the land of the dead.

All the Names is a curious mixture of the portentous and the absurd. It has strong echoes of Borges, Beckett, and, of course, Kafka; but its voice is distinctive and thoroughly its own. Despite the reticence of tone and the lugubrious nature of the action (such as it is), the reader will have an unflagging sense of something profound going on just beyond the limits of comprehension. The book is Modernist rather than Postmodernist—or Humanist rather than Post-Humanist; Saramago, for all his elusiveness and sly humor, is concerned that we should understand and appreciate the seriousness, the deadly seriousness, of the quest that his poor, Quixotic protagonist has embarked on, and which, it seems, will never be brought to an end, except by death.

In the course of a long address to his staff, the Registrar seems to provide a motto that his clerk might carry with him on his errantry: "Just as definitive death is the ultimate fruit of the will to forget, so the will to remember will perpetuate our lives." I do not pretend to know exactly what this pronouncement, and many other such pronouncements, may signify, but they do seem to signify something worth knowing. When Senhor José finally gains access to the book's version of the Chapel Perilous—that is, the unknown woman's empty apartment—the narrative delivers what seems both a valediction and a validation:

> Here lived a woman who committed suicide for unknown reasons, who had been married and got divorced, who could have gone to live with her parents after the divorce, but had preferred to live alone, a woman who, like all women, was once a child and a girl, but who even then, in a certain indefinable way, was already the woman she was going to be, a mathematics teacher whose name while she was alive was in the Central Registry, along with the names of all the people alive in this city, a woman whose dead name returned to the living world because Senhor José went to rescue her from the dead world, just her name, not her, a clerk can only do so much.

What can any of us do, Saramago seems to be saying, except—like the blind writer, like the unknown woman, like Senhor José himself—leave a few scribbled signs for those who come after us to read as best they can? But if this is so, then surely it must also be our duty to make the meaning of our signs as tangible as possible for those who come after us. Otherwise all we will have done is put impediments in the way of the blind. Vagueness may be fashionable, but clarity is timeless. ■

The Evil of Banality

By RICHARD PIPES

Stalinism As a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents by Lewis Siegelbaum and Andrei Sokolov

(Yale University Press, 460 pp., $35)

WHEN THE SOVIET Union dissolved toward the end of 1990, Boris Yeltsin removed the country's archives from the control of the Communist Party and threw open the majority of them to scholars, native as well as foreign. Several archives containing the most sensitive documents—the so-called Presidential Archive, along with the archives housing the papers of the KGB and the Foreign Ministry—remain virtually closed to outsiders. Even so, an enormous quantity of documentation, previously secret or available only on a selective basis, is now accessible to every historian of the Soviet period.

Foreign scholars lost no time making use of the opportunity. They divided into two groups. One headed for the depositories containing records of the most sensitive decisions of the Soviet government. A highly revealing study in this category was edited by the Russian dissident Vladimir Bukovskii, called *The Moscow Trial*. In 1992, Bukovskii was given access to the most secret documents, including minutes of the Politburo, as an expert witness for the Russian Constitutional Court in a trial of the Communist Party, and he managed to outsmart the archivists who had never seen a scanner and to copy thousands of documents relating to high-level Soviet policies. (Although it has been translated into French and German, his extraordinary exposé still awaits an American publisher.) My own collection *The Unknown Lenin*, containing selections from the secret papers of the Soviet leader in what used to be the Central Party Archive, belongs to the same type of research and interpretation.

The authors of such works proceed on the assumption that in the Soviet totalitarian state the prime mover of events was the Communist Party, and hence what mattered were the decisions of the political leadership. But another group of scholars chose to ignore the politicians. They turned instead to the archives containing the seemingly most mundane materials bearing on everyday life in the Soviet Union, such as letters written by ordinary citizens to the authorities and newspaper editors. This group belonged to what in the 1960s came to be known as the "revisionist" school of Russian historians. They postulated that all history is made "from below," that is, by the interaction between the rulers and the ruled; and that in this interaction the latter play the decisive role. The same rule, in their opinion, applied also to Communist Russia. Thus Lenin did not seize power in October 1917, he was driven to do so by the radicalized masses. Stalin's regime, too, was not "totalitarian," because behind the façade of conformity there existed a complex interplay between government and people.

Andrei Sokolov, one of the editors of *Stalinism As a Way of Life*, wrote in the Russian counterpart of this book that he viewed "the political structures ... not as self-sufficient and self-regulating but as the consequence of social changes and shocks." This approach is really a

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watered-down version of the Marx-Engels theory that all history is a story of class struggles, with politics merely reflecting the alignment of social and economic forces. The purpose of such research, therefore, was to demonstrate how in an ostensibly "self-sufficient and self-regulating" state such as the Soviet Union, society played a determining role. It is far from clear that this task has been accomplished.

The present volume covers the years between 1929 and 1941, with most of the materials dating from the middle '30s to the late '30s. The parallel Russian volume, edited by Sokolov, published in Moscow

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Kolkhoz members parade under the banner "We will liquidate the kulaks as a class," early 1930s

in 1998 as *Golos Naroda* (*The Voice of the People*), dealt with the preceding period (1918-1932). *Stalinism As a Way of Life* reproduces 157 documents, many of them letters to the authorities as well as to newspapers, especially *Krest'ianskaia Gazeta* (*Peasant Newspaper*), along with reports of government officials on the public mood, all accompanied by the editor's commentaries.

The documents make for very depressing reading. They consist of a relentless succession of complaints, appeals, cries of despair, and denunciations, relieved only rarely by unintended flashes of grim humor (as, for example, a GULAG official proposing to build—with forced labor, of course—a canal from Moscow to the Pacific coast.) As the Great Terror of 1937-1938 draws near, the documents become desperate in their incomprehension of what is happening and in their frenzied, self-serving glorification of Stalin.

Most of the documents are too long to cite, so a few examples must suffice. The first is an anonymous letter sent to *Pravda* from Kazakhstan in 1932:

> Comrade Editor,
>
> Please give me an answer. Do the local authorities have the right forcibly to take away the only cow of industrial and office workers? What is more, they demand a receipt showing that the cow was handed over voluntarily and they threaten you by saying that if you don't do this, they will put you in prison for failure to fulfill the meat procurement. How can you live when the cooperative distributes only black bread, and at the market goods have the prices of 1919 and 1920? Lice have eaten us to death, and soap is given only to railroad workers. From hunger and filth we have a massive outbreak of spotted fever.

The next is a collective letter to Mikhail Kalinin, the Soviet Union's pro forma "Head of State," on behalf of 50,000 women exiled during collectivization:

> Our husbands are separated from us. They are off lumbering somewhere, and we women, old people, and small children are left behind to languish in churches. As many as two thousand of us have been packed into each church where plank beds have been put up three stories high so there is always a steamy mist in the air. We have all become sick from this air and the drafts, and children under fourteen have dropped like flies, and there's been no medical assistance for all these sick persons. In the course of a month and a half as many as three thousand children have been buried in the Vologda cemetery.... We brought a supply of food with us, but when they moved us, the local officials in Vologda took it away.... Now they give us nothing except hot water.

The third letter, dated 1936, is from a kolkhoz farmer who responds to the government's request for comments on the draft of the Stalin "Constitution":

> A kind of constitution should be put out so that everyone can live freely and so that the brigade leaders don't shout at us—Hey, why don't you go to work, otherwise I will deal with you. You can't say a word in your own defense, or they will start to threaten: "Don't talk so much, or I will nail you with article 58. Van'ka got ten years of pulling wheelbarrows and it's time for you to land up there...." I got to thinking and I started feeling ashamed, we live in a free country, but there are so many prisoners and for what? If your crops get diseased, it's ten years, if your horse wears out its withers, it's ten years, if you didn't give somebody a cigarette, it's ten years, and so on, if our dear leader Comrade Stalin knew what is going in the countryside, he would never forgive it.

What is surprising in all these documents, given the weak development in Russia of civil society, is the belief that human beings have rights and that there is something very wrong when those rights are trampled upon.

Lewis Siegelbaum has performed a major service by selecting and translating these materials which depict the day-to-day conditions of life under Stalin, and do so the more vividly for having been written by semiliterate peasants and workers. The information that he supplies makes real, in human terms, such abstractions as "collectivization," "industrialization," and "terror." His book supplements Sheila Fitzpatrick's *Everyday Stalinism* (1999) which, drawing on similar evidence, described the life of urban Russia in the 1930s.

Yet Siegelbaum's interpretation of these materials raises troubling questions. He seems to have difficulty accepting the texts at their face value, and feels compelled to interpret them in sociological jargon that robs them of their force and dilutes their message. Consider collectivization, one of the most destructive acts in Russian history. It plundered the peasants of their land, their livestock, and their crops, transforming them into state serfs. The resistance to this mass expropriation was ferocious: Stalin confided to Churchill that the collectivization

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campaign, which lasted some three years, had been more "stressful" than World War II. In 1932, a certain I. Gusev sent a letter on the desperate situation in the North Caucasus:

> We are left naked, barefoot, two hundred grams of barley bread a day and we eat cabbage without butter. It's terrible to see a big strong man cry, and he cries because they deceived him with the kolkhoz, because he's left without a farm, without bread, without clothes, and he's lost his freedom.

This seems straightforward enough, but Siegelbaum finds such explanations of resistance to collectivization too simple: "Was this a case of the defense of tradition versus a particularly brutal form of enforced modernization?" he asks in the introduction to the book. Apart from the fact that herding farmers into state-run collectives hardly represented "modernization," one should think that such pathetic cries require no scholarly exegesis.

In his discussion of the Great Terror, Siegelbaum speaks condescendingly, with reference to Robert Conquest's book of that title, about "the simplicity and clarity of the classical interpretation of a paranoid ruler who ruthlessly exterminated former colleagues and millions of others in his unquenchable thirst of power." In fact, we now know from other archival sources, sometimes in gory detail, that Stalin personally supervised the massacres: thus, on a single day, December 12, 1938, he signed death sentences for 5,000 people who had never been tried, after which he went to his private Kremlin movie theater to enjoy two films, one of them a comedy called *Merry Fellows*. There were many such days.

Siegelbaum has no explanation of his own to offer for the Great Terror, but he submits a number of "potentially valuable" approaches, including one which "emphasizes the discursive significance of 'purification' and 'degeneration' and the desire of Stalinist subjects to be among the pure." This is admirably sophisticated, but one wonders whether the same thought ever occurred to Stalin when in instructions to police officials assigned to carry out his terror he summed up their task in one word: "beat."

There is a reluctance in Siegelbaum's discussion to concede the totalitarian nature of the Stalinist regime, and also a related inclination, contradicted by the documents cited, to see "social support for the regime." True, there were groups that benefitted from the "purges" by moving into positions vacated by their victims. Not a few Soviet citizens denounced to the authorities as "wreckers," "Trotskyists", and "spies" their bosses, colleagues, and acquaintances, but this surely was an attempt to save their own skins, not an expression of support for the terror. One cannot but wonder what is the use of social science when the main conclusion that Siegelbaum draws from his heart-rending evidence is that "the picture we present of how Soviet citizens tried to navigate the 'massive social transformations' of the 1930s is not a particularly happy one." In human terms, the evidence that he adduces shows that it is a very, very tragic one.

The documents collected and analyzed by Sokolov, Fitzpatrick, and now Siegelbaum offer no support to the revisionist theory of "history from below." On the contrary: they indicate more convincingly than ever that Soviet citizens were the helpless victims of a totalitarian regime driven primarily by a lust for power. They vindicate "the simplicity and clarity of the classical interpretation of a paranoid ruler." They thus validate the work of the older generation of Soviet specialists, such as Leonard Schapiro, Merle Fainsod, and Robert Conquest. Politics were indeed the motor driving Soviet history: it was made not "from below" but "from above." ■

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JERUSALEM DIARIST

Belief Net

WHEN I ARRIVED IN Israel several months ago to begin a year-long fellowship, I was greeted with open arms. Seeing my dark hair and "Eastern" look, Israelis assumed I was a Sephardic Jew. And, hearing my American accent, they assumed I was an Iranian-American Jew who had come to Israel to study and reconnect with her religious roots. And they were partly correct: I am American, I am of Iranian heritage, and I am here to study. But they got one thing wrong: I am not Jewish.

BY BIRTH, I AM MUSLIM. BUT, GROWing up in Southern California's exiled Iranian community, the world of my childhood was passionately secular. My family came to the United States in 1979, unsure of how long we would be staying but certain of our distaste for politicized religion. And, as the years passed, we felt increasingly betrayed by Islam, as we saw our religion used to divide and demonize our country, legitimize theocratic tyrants, and eliminate freedom of thought from all walks of life. Embracing a secular identity was our family's—and much of the rest of the exile community's—response. In that community, ethnic heritage was front and center, but religion was mostly a private matter—something that had little bearing on how you were publicly perceived. Indeed, I didn't know (or care) who among my Iranian friends was Muslim or Jewish until we turned 13 and the Bar and Bat Mitzvah invitations began to arrive in the mail.

IN ISRAEL, I LEARNED, SUCH AMBIguity is not permitted. Upon discovering my background, Israelis and Palestinians were quick to explain to me where I fit in and whose side I was on—in essence, who I really was. Some Israelis saw my allegiance as a kind of equation. During a weekend I spent in Haifa with an Israeli friend's family, my friend's uncle, after inquiring about my background, pronounced: "If your family left Iran at the time of the revolution, you must have been sympathizers with the Shah, and since the deposed Shah of Iran was an ally of Israel, then you must be a sympathizer with Israel." And, with that, he relaxed. It was quite a relief, apparently, not to have an ambiguously aligned guest in his home.

BUT FOR THE MAJORITY OF ISRAELIS I met, the equation came out not positive but negative. They concluded that if I was Iranian-American and *not* Jewish, then I was automatically an Arab sympathizer. During a three-hour interrogation at Ben-Gurion Airport, an 18-year-old female security officer repeatedly pressed me to admit that I spoke Arabic, even after I told her that Iranians don't speak Arabic, they speak Farsi. "All Muslims speak the same language," she responded. Frustrated, she summoned two higher-ranking officers, who demanded to know why I was studying at Hebrew University and not at Bir Zeit, the nationalistic Palestinian university in the West Bank. They couldn't comprehend why a non-Jew would want to study in Israel.

THE PALESTINIANS I'VE MET HAVEN'T been much different. One afternoon in the Old City of Jerusalem—an area overflowing with tourists before Ariel Sharon's controversial visit to the Temple Mount last September—I navigated the mazelike marketplace that fills the walkways between the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Al-Aqsa mosque before stopping at a colorful kiosk in the Muslim Quarter to buy spices. As a Palestinian man filled the small bags with my requests, he asked where I was from. "America," I replied. Not satisfied, he probed further: "But where is your family from?" "From Iran," I said. He turned around and called out to two nearby elderly men engrossed in a game of backgammon. They came over to the kiosk, and the older of the two began thanking me profusely. Confused as to why he was so appreciative of my paprika purchase, I asked, "Thank you for what?" "THANK YOU FOR HEZBOLLAH!" he repeated over and over. Apparently not registering the disconcerted look on my face, he continued to smile and nod approvingly. I walked away in shock, wondering if I should have explained that I actually have even more reason than the average Jewish Israeli to oppose Hezbollah. But I kept quiet, because I assumed, naïvely, that this would be an isolated experience.

IT WASN'T. FROM HAIFA TO EILAT, I have been thanked for Hezbollah by numerous Arabs, and not just the poor or elderly or uneducated. Consider the Arab Israeli lawyer in East Jerusalem—a Hebrew University graduate—who said he felt a bond with me once he found out I was originally from Iran and, most importantly, not Jewish. In an impassioned tone, he thanked me for everything I'd done in southern Lebanon. "You are doing good things," he assured me. "Hezbollah does good things for us, Iran is our friend, and you are my friend." My attempts to delink myself from Hezbollah—mindful that I represent the nearly nonexistent population of non-Jewish Iranians living in Israel—were futile. Who knew spending a year in Israel would be my chance to serve as a representative of the "Party of God"?

I DON'T PRETEND THAT THE LOS ANGEles of my youth represents the apex of human civilization. But living for several months in a country obsessed with religious classification has made me appreciate growing up in a place where I was allowed to decide for myself whether or not I wanted a religion to call my own. Though both America and Israel are rightfully proud of their traditions of political democracy, only America leaves room for one to have a truly secular identity. In the United States, in fact, the more ambiguous you are, the better: Keep your religion, politics, sexual orientation, and the like to yourself, and people feel more comfortable having you around. As the old American cliché goes: Don't talk about politics or religion with strangers. To be sure, that hesitancy to categorize and be categorized *sometimes* makes American culture seem vacuous or superficial. But here, if people do not know your identity coordinates, you are perceived as a threat. My time in this country of religious passion and religious majesty has confirmed in me a deep belief in the value of a secular society and a secular state. After all, the insistence on religious classification implicitly threatens those who don't define themselves by religious doctrine. Not long ago, the most glamorous hotel in the Gaza Strip burned down. Its destruction was not the result of an electrical malfunction or a misdirected Israeli missile; it was torched by a group of Palestinians angry that the hotel bar served alcohol. Many years from now, I will know the perpetual strife between Israelis and Palestinians has subsided not when a new Camp David accord is signed, or even when clashes between the two groups stop, but when some level of ambiguity is allowed to enter everyday life.

NEGAR AKHAVI

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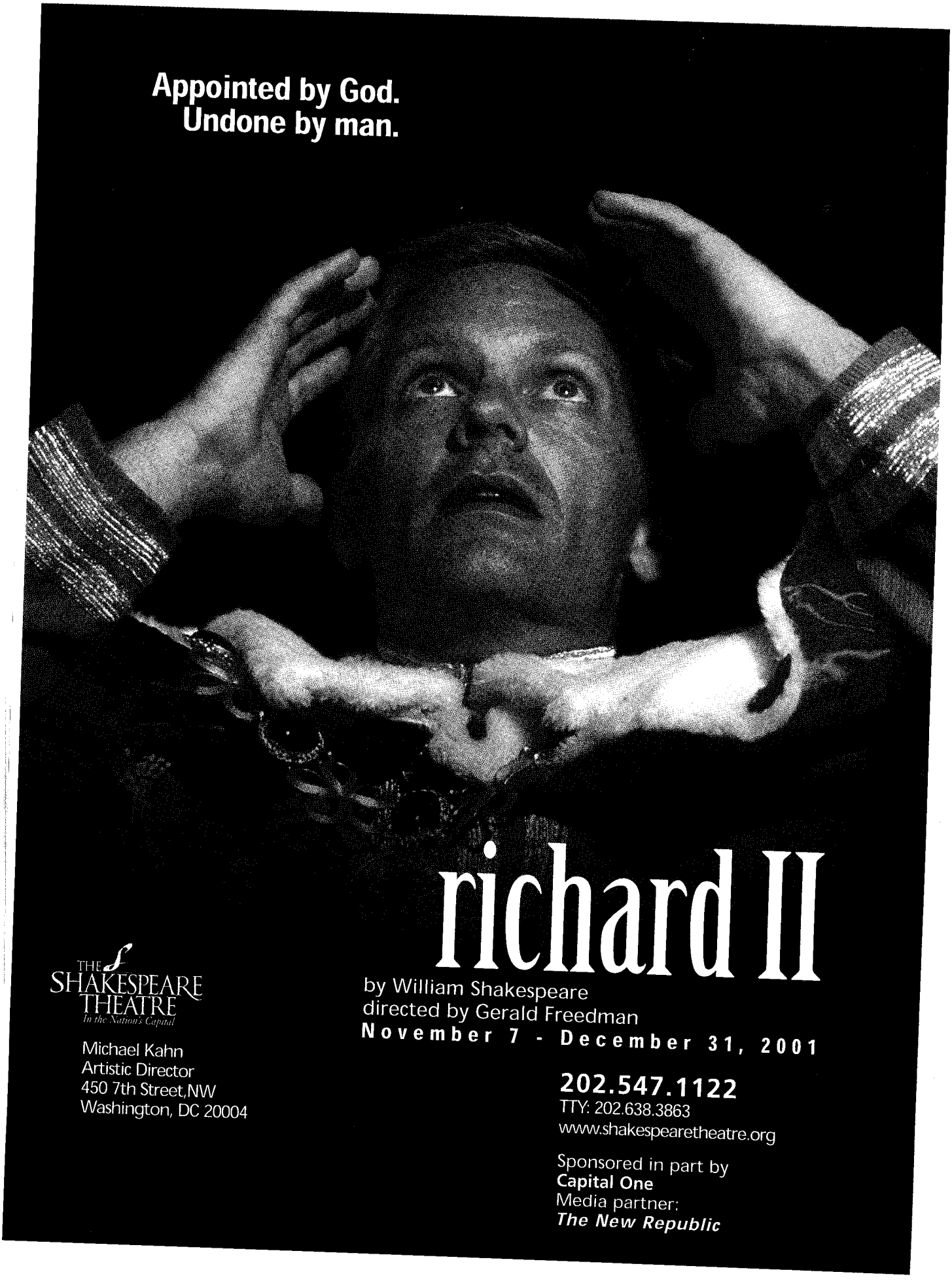

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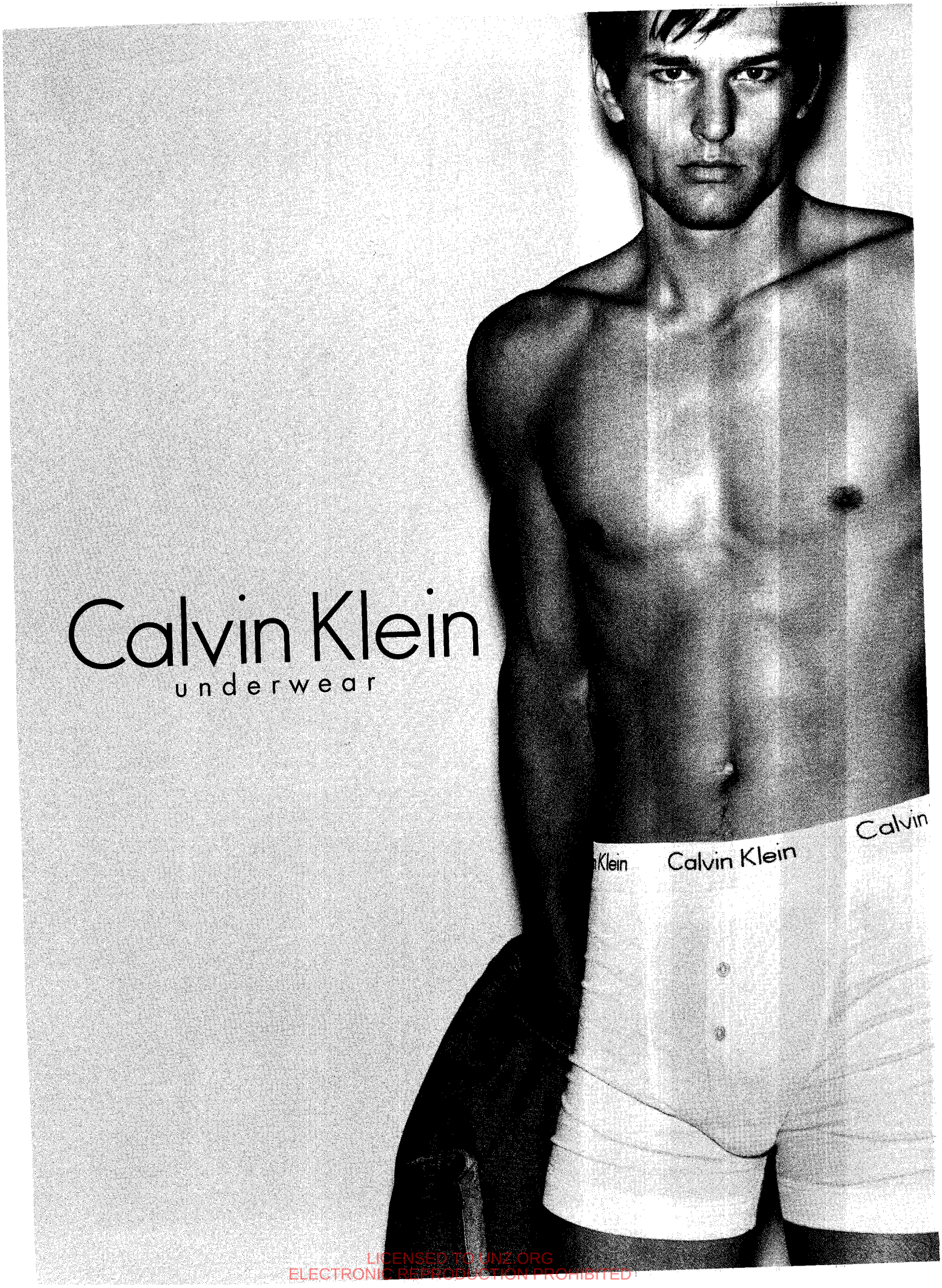

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